

## **Is a Recreational Path likely to remain on Ordnance Survey Mapping**

When submitting a route to Ordnance Survey (OS) they give you criteria as follows:-The path needs to be at least 20 miles (37km) in length; you need a book with a guide or description; it needs to be way marked. This can take an enormous amount of effort since all County, District and Parish Councils need to be informed, which can lead to contacting landowners and farmers, also any National Parks and areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, and to obtain endorsements from all Local Authorities.

In spite of obtaining what appears to be a successful conclusion the route can be removed from mapping without any notice as it was with the Samaritans Way South West, a long distance path of 100miles(160km) going the length and breadth of Somerset from Bristol to Lynton. The path was opened on the 21st April 2004 by the Vice President of the Ramblers, the Chief Executive of Samaritans and a farmer from Gloucestershire who headed to Farmers Helpline, giving a listening ear to farmers suffering in the decline of the industry.

All Authorities gave good feedback and in some cases negotiations took a little longer, also encouraging remarks were made. With this encouragement the Samaritans Way South West Association ( SWSWA) continued working very hard including responding to a request from some Authorities for a more definable title, which revised the book title and the way marks, a costly exercise. Whilst this was going on Somerset C C commenced action to erase the whole of the route from OS Mapping as long ago as 2006 and according to OS this was finalised in December 2007 after consultation had taken place between Exmoor National Park, Quantock ANOB and OS. None of the above authorities contacted the SWSWA, as the removal was discovered by browsing in a bookshop, therefore giving no opportunity for discussions or negotiation. It was not so much the legality of the action but the manner in which it was conducted especially as part of the route had been replaced by another recreational path on the map sponsored by the Local Authorities.

The main sticking point in the criteria was the way marking since OS said it needed to be signed the whole route. This was not allowed over Quantocks ANOB and Exmoor NP understandably so, since plastic way marks can be an eyesore. Letters from the above authorities stated:- *'a person is welcome to promote a route and have it published on OS maps providing OS will permit this in the knowledge that no increased promotion or maintenance will be done by the relevant authority and they would not permit any such route to be way marked.'* They also added; *' I hope this is of some assistance and the route is progressing well and wished luck with the project.'* These conditions were accepted by the creator of the SWSW route and the OS which interpreted this as an endorsement to print the whole route on 13 relevant maps. Somerset C C also wished me good luck and stated the Council had no objection to the route being shown as a long distance trail on OS Mapping. A letter followed from OS stating they had received approval from all local authorities and the route will be shown on all future editions as they are revised and again wishing success for the future.

It may well be the case there is a technicality that the route can be removed from mapping but it is so well hidden in the wording of the endorsement which certainly gave the creator and OS a green light to go ahead; this coupled with the lack of commerciality can only be described as totally unjustified for a few lozenge etchings on a map designed for recreational purposes which does the authorities no harm at all, but is of great benefit for the route.

The idea to support the farmers and by raising money for the Samaritans came from an article in a Sunday paper in 1993 written by a farmer who happened to be an employer of the author in the early 1960's. So far the route has taken 17 years to develop. The first 7 years 1993-2000 was mainly occupied with reporting and working on a huge amount of footpath problems to obtain a fairly clear route between the Mendips and Quantock hills before a guide book could be published in 2000. £7000 of personal money was included approx. 2000 miles of walking editing the route and using public transport, this taking up weekends and public holidays since people were in full time employment. It was a lonely job for the first four years then a friend of the author became involved which was of huge benefit. After ten years a small band of loyal people formed the SWSWA.

Unfortunately the whole route was erased, this included from the edge of Bristol to the Quantocks. Which was outside the sensitive areas of Exmoor NP and Quantocks ANOB and where the route needed so much work over the years. (A list of such work is available) There were a lot of dairy farmers struggling to make a living which was the main purpose of raising money for the Samaritans. This also omitted the towns of Glastonbury and Street which could well do with the economy from walkers as there is no other recreational path through these towns. Since alterations take place from time to time it was necessary to update sections which is now on the website, and far from undaunted it will continue and hope to raise money for the rural economy and remember farming is one of the few industries left in the country, its there forever not like a lot of companies who move their production abroad.

It has taken almost 2 years of writing to the various Authorities to try and obtain a successful conclusion, also a possible compromise, but no ground or flexibility has been given. Legal fees for the SWSW Association were far too expensive to pursue so our only option was to take the case to the Local Government Ombudsman. She could not make a decision on the merits of the case relating to the withdraw of the route from OS Mapping but a fine (or compensation?) of £500 is to be paid by Somerset C C to SWSWA through lack of communication in the first place and their failure to consult or inform us of their intentions. Naturally the £500 will be paid to the Samaritan's Charity, no personal money or profit goes to any individual.

Perhaps the route will be recognised one day which would not only benefit the rural community which according to an article in the Western Daily Press 17 April 2010 stating Exmoor desire for a higher profile on the tourist map. In the meantime please try the route yourselves and give your own assessment even if you don't walk please support the farmers by way of the Samaritans with donations or written support.

I wish any future developers of recreational paths every success. For more information please visit the website <http://www.samaritansway-southwest.org.uk/> The route is not yet perfect, please report any footpath problems to the SWSWA or directly to the relevant Local Authority.

*Graham Hoyle, Farm Worker and Designer of the Walk Route May 2010*