



The guide to finding lost rights of way



Well over 140,000 miles of public paths criss-cross England and Wales. This network has evolved over centuries with many paths dating back to medieval times - or earlier! These paths link villages, hamlets, roads and towns - they describe how generations before us travelled to the pub, field or shops and reflect the changing patterns of human interaction with the landscape. To this day, millions of people across our towns, cities and countryside, use this fantastic network.

However, miles and miles of our public paths will be lost, simply because they are not recorded on the definitive map - the official record of the public's rights of way in an area. One estimate suggests that **10,000 miles of rights of way are at risk** - enough to stretch from London to Sydney. These public rights of way have been created by use over centuries and must be recorded so they can be used and enjoyed by generations to come. If they are not recorded by 1 January 2026, **they will be lost for ever**.

The Ramblers' Don't Lose Your Way project is supporting volunteers from all over England and Wales in finding these lost rights of way and making applications to local authorities to get them back on the map.

This guide explains how you can start the hunt for lost rights of way in your area.

Finding lost rights of way

There are three easy ways to start hunting for lost rights of way

1 Explore the old maps:

Old maps show what your local area looked like in days past, and often show lost rights of way that may have fallen into disuse, or simply not been recorded on more recent maps.

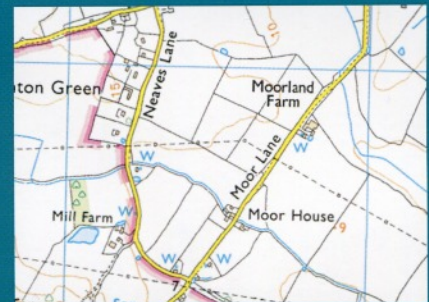
Old maps are available from local and national archives – and often laying in boxes in second hand bookshops. But they can also be found and studied online, so there's no need to wait or set out on a big expedition. You can get hunting today!

The National Library of Scotland has digitised a range of maps (which cover the whole of the UK) - all of which are georeferenced so you can zoom right into your local area. Just select any of the Ordnance Survey (OS) or Bartholomew maps on the left toolbar and see what roads and paths used to exist where you live. If you find a footpath (F.P.), bridle road (B.R.) or a road marked on a historic map, but which you can't see on a current Ordnance Survey map - this might be a lost right of way!

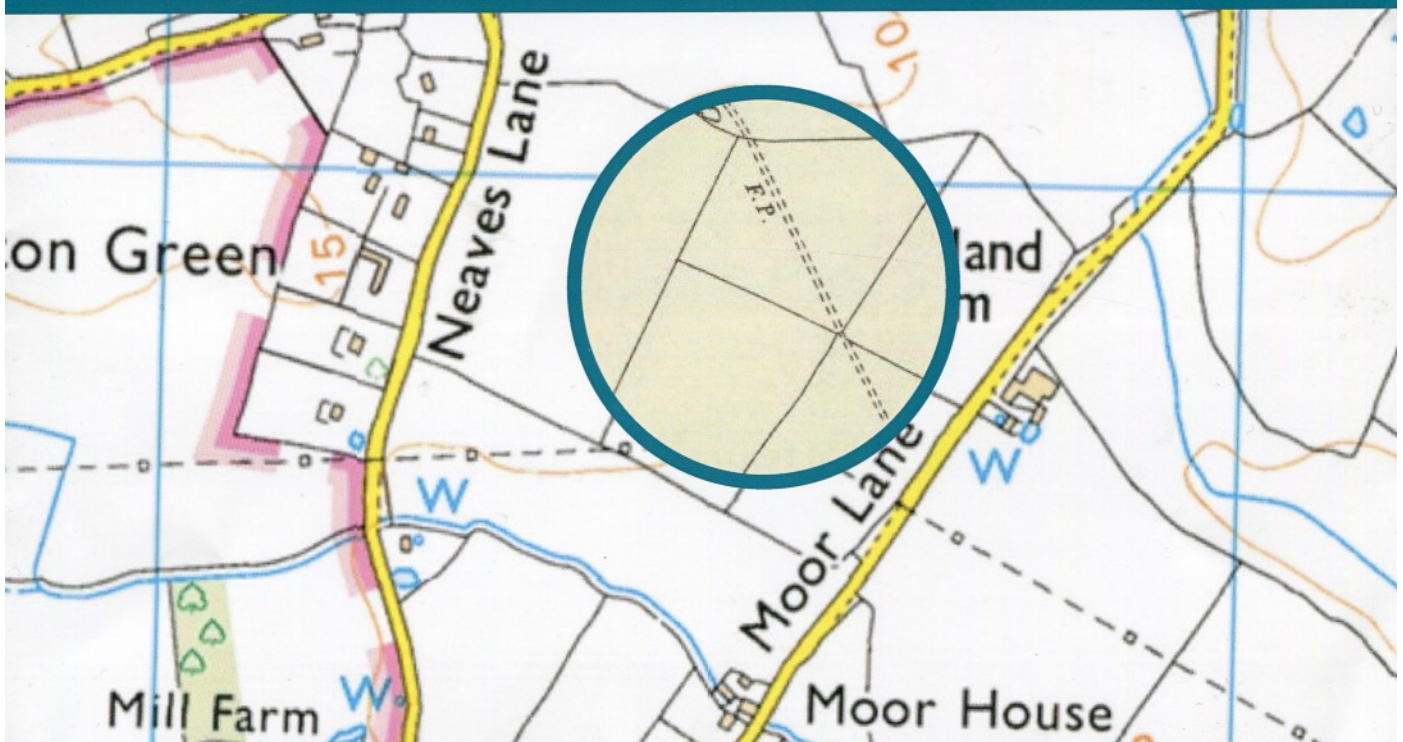
There are many other sources of historic maps online, including many which just cover your local area. The Ramblers has created a handy directory of all these sources.



Map of Ringmer 1907



Map of Ringmer 2018



Finding lost rights of way

2 Look for clues around you:

When out walking you can look for clues which may reveal the traces of historic paths in the landscape. Some clues are:

- A worn stone stile which may indicate an old entranceway and footpath
- Rows of two hedges (often Hawthorn) which can show that where a bridleway or carriageway might have once run
- A path which has been “hollowed out” by use over generations
- Evidence of an old stone surface in a field which may indicate a historical road
- Cobbles laid in a river which might show the presence of an old ford

It is also worth checking to see that the routes you may use every day are actually on the definitive map. It might sound silly, but there are many routes being used today that still have not been recorded. Only by recording them can we safeguard these routes for the future.



Finding lost rights of way

3 Study the current network of rights of way:

Simply by looking at the current rights of way network - on an Ordnance Survey map or on your local definitive map - it is possible to see things that don't quite make sense, for instance:

- A right of way that suddenly stops, perhaps at the parish boundary. It is rare that a right of way will be a dead-end, so perhaps something is missing?
- A right of way that doesn't quite reach the road. Perhaps the road has moved over time but the recording of the right of way hasn't been adjusted?
- A parish which has an abundance of rights of way next to a parish with relatively few. Why should there be such a difference?



If you would like to get involved in the hunt for lost rights of way in your area or think you have identified a lost right of way, please let us know: DLYW@Ramblers.org.uk

