

# Taunton District Bridleway Association Newsletter

2023 Review



## Chairperson Ann Finn's Welcome

The odd weather throughout the year has caused problems for us in trying to organise events this year but we did manage to hold several events.

We have also been regularly active in following up problems on the bridleway network; meeting the wardens to try to sort out longstanding issues. Unfortunately, some of these are not easily solved.

Some new wardens have been recruited but each one has about 500 cases and covers an extensive area.

Their budget has already been drastically reduced and with the dire financial position of Somerset Council, Rights of Way are unlikely to be a priority. Parish Councils have already been asked to consider which services they could take over to avoid the County going bankrupt. So, self-help in maintenance of routes could be the way forward.

If your horse is sensible, take some secateurs out on your rides so you can cut back small overhanging growth. A working party can clear nettles and overgrown ground cover with hand tools and be covered by our BHS insurance if we are given the details of when and where.

As we are affiliated to the BHS, some of the Committee attended the online BHS Access conference; an interesting day with a variety of topics covered. One speaker was an ex- MP talking about the importance of lobbying our MPs, particularly as this is an election year. Our MP is Rebecca Pow, an Environmental Minister so a good one to lobby!

It was suggested that we attend MPs surgeries or write letters as a lot of the legislation on Access is discriminatory against equestrians. The current emphasis is on Active Travel which does not include equestrians though BHS is working on changing this. There is also a lot of prejudice against multi-user paths although those which do exist have few, if any, problems.

Another issue is that the Government has stopped promoting Access in the Environmental Land Management Scheme which is being developed since Brexit. Originally Access was included under the Payment for Public Goods section, but this no longer is included. It was hoped that more Access to field margins would be gained if landowners were compensated for this.

The BHS web page has sample letters from which you can get the figures for incidents, but she emphasised that it better to write in your words.

Thank you all very much for your support during 2023, particularly the Committee,

and wishing you all many happy hours riding in 2024.

Our AGM was held via Zoom on **Wednesday 31<sup>st</sup> January** where we provided a summary of the accounts and is now available on our website. The good news is we have raised some additional funds and will look to support local track work in 2024.

## Tack Sale

In the Spring we ran a tack sale back at an old venue of Hatch Beauchamp Village Hall, which



was very well attended by sellers with both the inside and outside spaces filled. The weather gods smiled on us, and it was a wonderful opportunity for friends to catch up after a long winter over some homemade cakes and a cuppa which also did a roaring trade!

## Fun Rides

In July we ran our annual Fun ride through the Dillington Estate. As in previous years, this is popular as a walk and trot ride, with a route going through the estate on areas which are not open to riders at other times. One of our committee members,



Domini, is a photographer ([Domi Ricci Photography](#)) and captured some lovely [shots](#) of those enjoying the ride.

Entries surpassed our expectations to a bumper number of 95 wonderful riders and their beautiful horses and ponies. The run up to the ride was slightly eventful with the changeable weather, the change to the management of areas of the Dillington Estate and a sudden re-growth of key areas of the ride which required some emergency cutting back just a few days before the ride from committee members and contractors. I think everyone agreed that the effort was well worth it.

New for 2023 was an exciting opportunity for the association to hold a second ride on the Quantock Hills by kind permission of the Warmington Family who own the Cothelstone estate.



Sadly, the weather gods decided to unleash biblical style weather and the appearance of the committee in an ark wouldn't have looked out of place! 19 incredibly gutsy riders did attend and took on the ride which was 90% off road across beautiful countryside, parkland, and hillside bridleways.

In 2024 we plan to run these 2 walk and trot rides again, if our venues can accommodate us, with dates TBC in July and Sept.

## Showing Show

Sadly, due to lack of entries we had to cancel our Spring showing show. We hope

to offer a show again in the future when resource allows.

## Fundraising

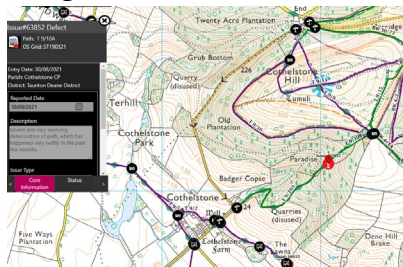
During 2023 we have raised £2350 over the three events.

## Bridleway work

The purpose of the association is to provide oversight for maintaining and preserving off-road riding routes for riders in our district.

The association can use our links with local rights of way officers to open lines of communication where required. We keep an electronic log of any bridleway issues which we are aware of/are ongoing with involvement of the association.

We welcome members raising concerns or areas of disrepair to the email and messenger inboxes. We require members to report any issues initially themselves using ROAM website.



The [ROAM](#) website is one of the main routes to raise a query/ problem on a right of way. These items, once raised on the map with a reference number are reviewed by the local area officer. They are required to review added items on the map every 48 hrs. It is then simple to keep track of the item raised and the response/ action provided.

Some issues we come across are simple to resolve but others can be a much more complex problem which often involves research into the type of path (definitive or permissive), contact with landowners (which are sometimes hard to identify/

track down). Usually, the most progress is made if we can arrange a meeting at the site of the problem and discuss with the parties, but of course this can take time and commitment.

## Maintenance of routes and access work

During 2023 we have worked on a number of issues. A lot of the time liaising with the landowner or responsible authority yields results and they are able to resolve the issues within their remit of responsibility.

Not all routes are publicly maintained, and some we adopt such as West Lane in Knapp. The association pays a private contractor to cut and maintain the lane twice a year.

This route has seen a lot of flooding this year but is provides a crucial link to a circular route to riders in Knapp and North Curry.



In Wych Lodge a private forest track which forks off from a public bridleway owned by Forestry England had significant work completed unrelated to equestrian use. The association were key in working with Forestry England to reinstate access to this agreed private route which is well used by local horse riders.

In Bishops Lydeard, a permissive byway which has allowed riders to access a short but much needed cut through was gated by the landowner to protect new livestock. This provided a safety concern for riders as the





gate was not easy to open from horseback and is positioned on a precarious corner. Riders had taken to not using the route. The association worked with the landowner and funded a horse latch for the gate. The route is now back in use and both the landowner and local riders are happy. We'll continue to work on a resolve for the gate at the other end of the track which is less straightforward.

Other issues we work on are to key connecting routes in the network. This bridleway connecting riders from the west side of the Quantocks near Kingston St Mary to Broomfield had been blocked for most of the year due to a fallen tree.

Upon further inspection it was found that there was reduced head height in other areas of the track and uneven footing making it dangerous to use. The local



authority employed two contractors to conduct a hard cut back of the overgrown trees and cut the fallen

tree back as much as possible.

Further work was then carried out to improve the footing on the track and digging out the bank to allow for easier passage on horse back.

The association carries out lots of bridleway inspections which lead to us making reports, and trying to work with landowners, and authorities to improve the route in some way. Sometimes however, a route is such a state that we are unable to proceed with any repair

works and will require wider support. One of these routes is based in Lydeard St Lawrence. It has had work carried out previously



on it which has sadly failed due to water damage and is now too dangerous to take a horse up. This bridleway is a key connecting route for riders of Lydeard St Lawrence to other routes towards Ash Priors.

This route has been brought to the attention of the local RoWO and plans are in place to speak to the BHS access team to see if any funds can be made available from the Ride Out Fund which would require match funding to carry out what would be considerable work to put this track back into use.

## Working with the local authority

A large part of what the association does is manage relationships with the stakeholders involved with bridleways. One of the key stakeholders is the local authority's Rights of Way Officers (RoWO) who are responsible for ensuring that all rights of way are accessible and safe, and sadly when required closing access to them when they are unsafe. Often RoWOs carry out basic clearing and maintenance themselves and are very skilled at stretching their decreasing budgets to keep the network in their areas open and usable where possible.

RoWO Sarah Creswell talks about the value of a Bridleway Association for the Local Authority. 'Having a named Bridleways Association contact within the area I cover has been useful. As someone who doesn't ride myself, I have been joined on site visits and had explained issues from a horse riders' perspective. This has provided me with an important insight into the various difficulties that may be encountered on routes whilst on horseback in comparison to just being on foot. For example, the surface condition of paths coinciding with the head clearance of low hanging branches, ease of opening gates on horseback and general manoeuvre room for getting around obstacles.

With limited resources and a large workload, (I have over 368 issues currently assigned to me on the Right of Way network), the association has helped me prioritise the reported issues on bridleways/restricted byways by highlighting which routes are most favoured by the local riding community. We have focussed on the routes which provide an important link to the wider bridleway network on the Quantock Hills. By having access to a Facebook group and other media platforms, they can inform the local riding community of works being carried out, live issues and current closures on the Public Right of Way network.

I'm very appreciative of the associations expertise and I'm sure we will continue to tackle issues as they arise together. If you're interested in volunteering with Somerset Council, please look at our current opportunities-  
<https://volunteering.somerset.gov.uk/>.

### **Affiliated to the British Horse Society**

The Association is affiliated to the BHS and works to support the BHS Access Team.

Two members of the Association are direct members of the BHS Access Team as Volunteer Access and Bridleway Officers. Ann Finn has held this role for over 10 years and has recently been joined by Karen Slade. Ann is responsible for Parishes in the South area of Taunton Deane, whereas Karen has taken on responsibility for Parishes over the West side of Taunton on the Quantock Hills and Surrounding areas.

This provides the Association with links to greater resources and regional officers who can support on wider access issues.

### **Reporting near misses/ incidents**

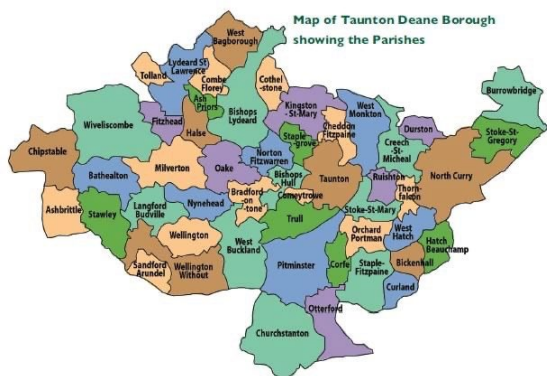
During the access conference which Ann refers to in her report above, there was a reminder of the importance of reporting accidents, near misses or incidents. (These could involve dogs, drones, fireworks, slippery surfaces but may not result in actual injury.) Without this data, the BHS have less leverage to influence change and improvements so please consider reporting them on the BHS website here or use the new 'Horse I app':

[The British Horse Society- incident reporting portal/ app](#)

### **Membership**

We can only continue to fund the work we do through memberships. Annual subscriptions to the association are now due, so we would be thrilled if you could support us for another year. We also ask if you can mention us to any friends who use local riding routes in the district. The members we have, the more eyes we have on the ground.





Membership has been kept at just £10 for the year, and can be completed using our online system, [member mojo](#).

### Join us.

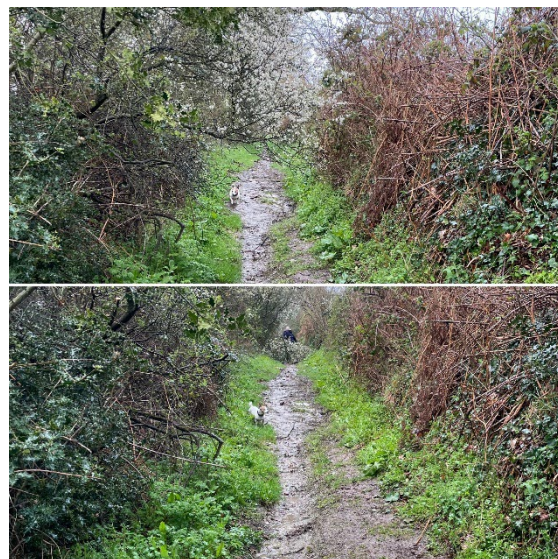
As a committee of 5, we're a busy group and would value any support you could provide. We can't run events without the wonderful volunteers who generously give up their time. It's also very time consuming keeping all bridleways inspected so if anyone wishes to volunteer to conduct inspections in their local areas then please drop us an email or a message via our Facebook page.

### What's happening in 2024?

As mentioned before, we are looking to run the two fun rides in July and Sept and focus the rest of our time on route queries and work.

If you have any suggestions for events and/ or can help arrange them, please get in touch.

## Some of our favourite pics of 2023



*Committee member Karen doing some bridleway clearing in the Spring with her long-suffering husband.*



*Committee members Karen with two of our amazing volunteers Chris and Lily-Mae Hayes braving the torrential rain.*



*Some of our elated riders after completing the Dillington fun ride.*



*Committee members Elaine and Ann on a bridleway inspection*



*Committee members Elaine and Karen testing out the Quantock fun ride route (it didn't rain that day!)*