

Public Rights of Way

Sketch map showing roads and public rights of way in Thurnham, 2007.



Every part of the parish is criss-crossed by footpaths and bridleways the preservation and maintenance of which was regarded as of high importance by nearly 80% of those responding to our survey. A larger and more detailed version of the sketch map shown left is available on the Parish Council's web site.

Currently there are 35 footpaths, including a section of the long distance North Downs Way and 2 permissive paths in the parish. Hence the area is easily accessible from the more heavily populated areas of Thurnham and Bearsted as well as to the many from outside the area that come to enjoy its beauty. With some exceptions the footpaths are respected by local farmers and land owners and their use safeguarded by an active footpath group, and visitors to the area.

The course of individual footpaths has been changed over the years to accommodate other users, sometimes with harmony; sometimes after lengthy and difficult negotiations. The greatest current threat to the network of paths and bridleways in the southern part of the parish comes from the proposed development by KIG. If this were to go through it would result in a wholesale re-routing of paths and their replacement with paths that would of necessity be cheek by jowl

with industrial development and therefore unattractive to walkers and unsuitable for horses.

North of the CTRL several footpaths, such as KH 108, (pictured right), lead off the Pilgrims Way and give access to the highest parts of the local downland covered by the AONB.

Use of footpaths

We asked people what difficulties they encountered when using footpaths. Our survey revealed that 32% of people found no difficulties. Against that, 22% were concerned about over growing bushes and nettles; 17% said that waymarking was poor, while 11% criticized the lack of sign posts and the problems posed by mud and water after heavy rain. Nine per cent, especially amongst the older members of the community, criticized high stiles, and smaller proportions were concerned about difficulties caused by crops growing across paths, locked gates, the presence of farm animals and the inconsiderate attitude of some other users, especially off-road motorcycles.



"Stiles and kissing gates should be altered if necessary so that disabled or elderly walkers can use them."

"Beating the Bounds should be revived to make it an active parish event. Not everyone need walk the whole boundary but some would enjoy doing so."

Thurnham residents

Other concerns voiced by people in their comments were sewage across paths near Coldblow Lane and Aldington Lane, and golfers' attitude to walkers using the footpaths across Bearsted Golf Club course.

While there is little that can be done about mud and water, especially in a year such as 2007, **we recommend that the Parish Council should:**

- **Press the Kent County Council to improve waymarking and sign posting on the extensive network of footpaths within the parish.**
- **Do all it can to put pressure on the Kent County Council to ensure that footpaths in the parish are kept clear and that stiles are of a height that allow them to be used comfortably by older walkers.**
- **Ensure that land owners comply with the legal requirement to restore footpaths within 14 days after ploughing.**
- **Continue to support the work of the local footpath group that does so much to ensure that these paths are kept open and serve the interests of the local community.**
- **In conjunction with the local footpath group, consider reviving the ancient practice of 'Beating the Bounds'.**

Use of Bridleways

There is very real concern amongst horse riders about the state of a number of the 13 bridleways that lie within the parish and those in other neighbouring parishes, such as Hucking and Hollingbourne.

For example, a gate has been installed by the road adjoining KH 98 - which leads into Squirrel Woods - presumably to stop cars from using it, but the gap



to the left is, as it stands, not ideal for horses and their riders. KH 89 is impassable at its northern end.

We are told that KH 106 which runs through Civeley Wood was the scene of an accident in October 2007 when a horse was spooked by a pheasant and became trapped in a flattened stock fence on the opposite side of the path. The horse suffered a tear in its skin and puncture type wound some quarter inch deep on the back of its knee joint on the right fore leg. Meanwhile, the right hoof had become trapped in the stock fencing (above left) with two strands of the fence wire lodged between its shoe and hoof (above right). Wire cutters had to be brought to the site to free the animal.

Problems also exist with KM81 and KM82 where the bridleway is not reinstated and compacted within the requisite period after ploughing making it difficult for horse riders to follow the right path whilst ponies often stumble or are unable to cope with the ruts left by the plough. Both bridleways provide traffic free access to the AONB.

We recommend that the Kent County Council which is responsible for the maintenance of bridleways should take action to ensure that land owners:

- **Cut back overhanging hedgerows and vegetation to create paths for riders.**
- **Remove trees and fallen branches from bridleways.**
- **Properly maintain fences bordering the bridleways and ensure they do not pose a hazard for horses or their riders.**
- **Comply with the legal requirement to reinstate bridleways within 14 days after ploughing.**

The Parish Council's clearly expressed opposition to the proposals for a road/rail inter-change are welcome for a whole number of reasons, not least the devastating impact it would have on footpaths and bridle ways in the southern part of the parish.