1. Introduction

With David Nunns, I attended the above workshop aimed at Area Footpath Secretaries. There were 37 delegates from 33 Areas and included a cross section of group footpaths officers and group chairmen. Ramblers CO representation included Kate Ashbrook [president] and several Policy Officers, supporting Project Manager Helen Mthiyane.

The day's proceedings involved presentation, discussion groups and Q&A sessions. A lively, beneficial workshop that was able to add substance to what had previously been a limited outline of the project.

Below is an overview of how the project is intended to develop, with comment concerning issues that could arise for our Area/Groups.

2. Intention

Survey conditions of public rights of way [excluding ORPAs] as shown on current OS maps to highlight problems and positive features. Collected data will be analysed to evidence problems and positives across the network, by local authority, Ramblers area and country.

OS [1:25000] grid squares containing rights of way will be surveyed. To enable meaningful data analysis, at least 200 grid squares per LA area [or fewer according to size of local authority] need to be checked.

3. Timescale

Mid - June to autumn is the planned timescale. It is hoped the survey will open for volunteers in June 2015 followed by the national public launch in July 2015 and to close in late autumn [end November].

Comment – ideally, a specific seasonal window for surveying would have captured comparative data. Surveys in July will identify problems e.g. cropping and over-growth that will disappear by late autumn.

4. Volunteers

Volunteers will be encouraged from membership, affiliated groups, non - ramblers walking groups, countryside agencies, Duke of Edinburgh organisers and the general public - in fact any/everyone.

Unless already on Ramblers database [as a volunteer in some capacity] volunteers will need to register on line. This is so, notwithstanding they may intend to manually record surveys.

Comment – at Area/Group level we need to encourage all members to contribute to the project. Footpath surveys historically have been done by only a handful of members. Two of our seven territorial groups, plus GYBO do not routinely survey paths and their involvement is essential.

Contact via mailshots is not an option until September. Thus methods of getting member sign up to volunteering is necessary at the earliest. These could include:-

1. • Prominent publicity on Area/Group [York & Scarborough] websites
2. • Group contact lists/yahoo forum e.g. Beverley, Ryedale & Scarborough
3. • Contact details of regular walkers/Leaders held by some Group Walks Secretaries being utilised
4. • Using member email/phone contact details held by Group Membership Secretaries

5. Publicity Strategy

A proposed communications plan for contacting volunteers, members and the public

launch is being prepared and will be forwarded to Areas within weeks.

6. Methodology
a) Getting Started

Comment - Acquiring survey sheets, maps and instructions, plus feeding in survey results is by computer, tablets, smart phones, iPhone and Android smart phones (not Windows smart phones).

1 1. Volunteers sign up on line - or have someone do it for them
2 2. Select a 1km x 1km grid square to survey [up to a maximum of 6 at any one time and completion within 4 weeks, otherwise up for reallocation]
3 3. Allocation system will prevent duplication
4 4. Print off map, guidance, and survey questions
5 5. OR download the free smartphone app
6 6. Walk every right of way in their chosen square(s)
7 7. Upload their findings via the app whilst they walk,
8 8. Have option to upload pictures, and share via social media
9 9. Otherwise upload results from written notes onto website when they get home
10 10. A list of FAQs is being developed to assist volunteers.

Comment – volunteers who are not computer users may be constrained unless someone assists in printing off maps and inputting results [checking with Project Manager to see if they are considering paper submissions].

b) Surveying

1 1. The Survey sheet has a list of 'problems' that may be encountered and resulting effect e.g. inconvenience or unusable.
2 2. Positive features and highlights of the walk also to be recorded

1 3. Surveyor ticks boxes as appropriate – no requirement for text input although a final box for comment is being considered.
2 4. Pinpointing problem by grid reference – probably automatic with smart 'phone.
3 5. Photograph (optional)

Comment – 4 above is only possible if using a smart phone incorporating GPS? The Survey Questions are being finalised and app to download being tweaked according-ly. NB: Survey is focussing on path condition including signs, furniture, obstructions, surfaces, etc. not definitive map legal issues [Ramblers trained surveyors will deal with these as normal outside of the survey scope].
c) Reporting Problems

It is planned for volunteers to log a problem on their survey sheet by grid reference [if they carry the technology]. This will be uploaded to Pathwatch Office staff who in the course of number crunching will report issues to the relevant Local Authority.

Questions from delegates centred on the problem reporting process. Specifically, whether data will be checked by footpath secretaries before sending it to the Highway Authority?
Responses indicate this should be determined at an area level - if Footpath Secretaries wish to check and verify reports they can, but it is not an expectation that they will do so.
Comment – volunteers will have varying knowledge levels and experience of path surveys, assessment being subjective. Some issues may require prompt referral to a LA and some delegates thought Area/Group Footpath Secretaries were best placed to manage this – however it would require them having sight of all such survey sheets. ERYC encourages path problems to be directly inputted into their Aspire automated reporting system that allocates a service reference number. NYCC asks for reports by email to paths@northyorks.gov.uk with one problem per e-mail and if possible one photo (no more than two) attached if possible. City of York asks for reports by email to publicrightsofway@york.gov.uk

7. Administration, Communication and Co-ordination

1 i. Project managed by Ramblers Pathwatch Office
2 ii. Communication between them and Area Chairs/Footpath Secretaries and groups as necessary

1 iii. Guaranteeing 100% coverage of OS grid squares is impossible.
2 iv. Pathwatch Office will advise Areas of OS grid squares without a volunteer, seeking assistance in getting the survey allocated, to ensure completion of the required minimum number of squares
3 v. There may be a requirement to enlist Area/Group help in a sweep up to ensure achievement of survey minimum requirement.
4 vi. Areas should inform their Local Authorities and other organisations of the project and aims.
5 vii. Updates on progress will feature on Ramblers website and by email to Area Chairs
6 viii. Final report will be copied to Area Chairs/Footpath Secretaries

Comment – As the project is OS grid based, Area/Group territorial boundaries will be of minimal relevance. However, it would be useful to have contact points of ref-erence or/and a co-ordinator at Area level. This could assist non-member volunteers with a query being directed to a local Ramblers source.

8. Issues for Area

1 i. Recruiting volunteers, plus help from other non - ramblers groups [para 4]
2 ii. Managing a common publicity strategy - we do not have a PR person [para 5]
3 iii. Deciding policy for dealing with problems arising from survey reports [para 6c]
4 iv. Liaison with Local Authorities and other organisations [para 7(6)]
5 v. Establishing a Co – ordination/Point of Reference – Area/Group based [para 7]

9. Conclusions

Perhaps equivalent to a 'Domesday' of rights of way, this is an ambitious project with prospects of 100% completion questionable. Crucial to achieving minimum tar-gets is a sufficiency of volunteers.
Getting volunteers must be a paramount task at Area and group level.
Having an opportunity to raise the Ramblers profile is always welcome. Publicity in the local media helps to educate the public and remind them of the Ramblers com-mitment to countryside protection.
Management of this project by Ramblers Pathwatch Office can only be remote, suc-cess being reliant upon commitment and support from Area/Groups.

10. Recommendations

1 A. Project be discussed at Area Council and Group Committee meetings
2 B. Area Council consider issues listed in paragraph 8
3 C. Have plans in place for launch of the project

Tony Carrigan.