



The State of Ryedale's Paths: Report of a survey

**The Ryedale Group of The Ramblers' Association
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Summary

Over the last two years the Ryedale Group of the Ramblers Association has carried out a survey of the Public Rights of Way (PROW) in Ryedale that are managed by the North Yorkshire County Council (NYCC). To do this, a small team of volunteers walked, graded and reported upon a total of 1,546 footpaths and bridleways in 92 Ryedale parishes. The findings of this survey are summarised below and then described more fully in the following pages.

The survey found that almost two in every five paths presented at least one problem, with many having multiple problems. In approximately one in ten PROWs the problems were so severe that they rendered the path completely un-useable or impassable. Problematic paths were not spread uniformly across Ryedale and the survey revealed several black-spot parishes that had a high proportion of paths with problems and/or a high concentration of paths with the most serious level of problems. Many of the parishes with highest percentages of paths with problems were villages that could be depicted as 'off the beaten track', though not all could be so described.

The problem most often identified related to signposting and across Ryedale around 300 signposts that are a statutory requirement were found to be missing or damaged. The survey showed that the second most frequently reported type of problem concerned obstructions – a shocking catalogue of different kinds of obstruction was portrayed by the path surveyors. Regrettably, it was all too obvious from their descriptions that most of the blocked paths had been obstructed deliberately. One in ten of all paths in Ryedale were blocked. Other commonly cited problems with paths in this District included overgrown vegetation, a lack of way-marking, paths being ploughed out and cropped over, and inadequate and sometimes dangerous stiles and gates. The survey evidence also demonstrated that the blocking of paths and the lack of bridges were key determinants of Ryedale's PROWs becoming un-useable and unidentifiable. In short, Ryedale's paths are in a dire state. In view of this, it is difficult to see how the Authority charged with the task of protecting and preserving footpaths and bridleways in this part of Ryedale – the NYCC – can claim to be fulfilling its role.

To explore this further, a group of the same survey volunteers used exactly the same methods to walk, observe and grade the PROWs that are managed by the North York Moors National Park (NYMNP) in five Ryedale parishes. To sum up the findings of the survey extension, the results clearly indicate that the NYCC is less effective than the NYMNP in that the NYCC-managed PROWS displayed:

- a higher percentage of paths with at least one problem;
- a greater likelihood of more paths with the most serious and debilitating problems;
- and much higher proportions of paths lacking statutory signposting and paths that are blighted by obstructions, cropping and ploughing out – all indications that the NYCC is especially weak in enforcing rights of way requirements with landowners.

To conclude, the evidence from the survey demonstrates the extent to which the NYCC is not managing Ryedale's PROWs effectively. The results underline the pressing case for a thorough 'root and branch' review of the current policies for the protection and preservation of Ryedale's paths.

The State of Ryedale's Paths: Report of a survey by Ryedale Ramblers

Formed in 1974, Ryedale is a non-metropolitan district within the county of North Yorkshire. With an area of 1507 km² (582 square miles), it is one of the largest districts of England (11th out of 326 English districts). Conversely, with a population of 51,900 (2011), it is one of the most thinly populated districts of England (319th out of 326). The three Ryedale towns with the largest populations are Pickering, Norton on Derwent and Malton; other relatively highly-populated settlements are Helmsley and Kirkbymoorside. According to the Ryedale District Council's website, *'Ryedale is a diverse and beautiful area of spectacular scenery, bustling market towns, dale and hill farms, and picturesque villages'*.

With a multitude of footpaths and bridleways to access these attractions, the district has the potential to be an attractive focal point for walkers and riders alike, be they residents or visitors. To the north its paths act as gateways to the North York Moors; to the east its paths open up on to the stunning North East Coast; to the south east they offer fine walking and riding in the rolling hills of the Yorkshire Wolds and access to the City of York; to the west and south-west they meander through the Howardian Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. The Council is clearly aware of this substantial asset for walkers: *'With 1,400 miles of country paths and tracks, Ryedale.. is walking country - gentle strolls, day walks and long-distance hikes are all on our doorstep. There are dozens of short walks encompassing everything from town trails to wildlife spotting'* (Ryedale DC website).

But is Ryedale really such a fine area for walking and riding? Is the district making the most of its undoubted wealth of public rights of way? Maps show that Ryedale has a formidable network of footpaths, but are they useable? Are these footpaths and bridleways well signposted, open and accessible? Are they being well maintained? Do they meet the needs of local residents (from dog walkers to long-distance trekkers), as well as the needs of walkers and riders visiting the District?

To try and provide answers to such questions, the Ryedale Group of The Ramblers Association organized a path survey of the Definitive Public Rights of Way (PROW) in Ryedale. A group of 27 volunteers, often working in pairs, set out to walk, grade and comment upon all the paths¹ in the District. However, part of Ryedale lies within the North York Moors National Park, which has the responsibility for asserting and protecting Ryedale's PROWs within the National Park's boundaries. Since these paths fall within the monitoring remit of the Cleveland Ramblers Group, it was deemed inappropriate for the

¹ For the sake of brevity, 'path' refers to all types of PROW that are surveyed here (i.e. footpaths, bridleways, BOATS). When it is necessary to refer to a footpath rather than say a bridleway, the term 'footpath' is used.

Ryedale Group to include them in their survey. North Yorkshire County Council (NYCC) has the statutory responsibility for all the PROWs in the Ryedale District that lay outside of the National Park and it is these that the Ryedale Ramblers aimed to cover through their survey. According to data provided by the NYCC, there are 1,565² paths (including footpaths, bridleways and BOATs – bye-ways open to all traffic) in this part of Ryedale, extending to a total of 570 miles (917km) of paths – approximately the distance from London to Inverness. Clearly, a lot of walking and observing was required of the team of volunteers.

These paths were spread across 92 parishes and in this part of Ryedale there are only two parishes that do not have a single path within their boundaries. Members of the team volunteered to take a parish and survey all the paths within it – a task they undertook between March 2013 and September 2014. They were asked to record their observations on two forms: a Survey Form and a Problems Sheet (blank copies of each attached at the end of this report). The first requested information on all the paths walked, whereas the second invited further details of paths that presented problems. On the Survey Form volunteers gave each and every path a grade on a 1 – 4 ‘condition of path’ numerical scale, made up as follows:

1	No problems
2	Passable/Minor problems: maintenance required e.g. missing fingerpost, way-marking required, faded sign, clearing path is necessary.
3	Difficult/More serious problems: path difficult to use e.g. illegal/misleading notice (e.g. ‘no public access’), surface destroyed, temporary obstruction, dangerous stile, a gate, stile or gap having barbed wire on/immediately next to hand rail etc.
4	Impassable/Path unusable on Definitive line e.g. permanent obstruction like a building, wall, other physical obstruction or impairment like an excavation, locked gates, or absence of a bridge or illegal diversion.

If a path had multiple problems, then the grade was recorded at a higher level e.g. if there was a missing sign and a dangerous stile, it was graded a 3. Completed forms were then sent to a team co-ordinator who checked the entries and, once finalised, forwarded both forms to the NYCC PROW Officers, as well as in most cases, the local parish council. At the

² The spreadsheet received from NYCC included more paths than this number. However, on closer inspection it was discovered that several PROWs had been double-counted by including, for example, path number 25/11 as well as 25/11/1, 25/11/2 and 25/11/3. Hence, the number shown here has been calculated by deleting the double-counting.

completion of all the parishes, data from both forms were assembled on to a single spreadsheet to facilitate analysis, the results of which are reported here³.

From the outset then, the volunteers set out to survey all the PROWs in Ryedale that lay outside the North Yorkshire Moors National Park. To what extent was this target achieved? The team managed to survey and report on 1,546 paths out of a possible 1,565 (once the adjustments described in footnote 2 were made) – 98.8% of the total. Hence, to all intents and purposes, the full complement of PROWs is included in the survey. The majority of the 19 missed paths – about one in every five parishes – were very short PROWs that were extremely difficult to identify on the NYCC’s website of numbered paths. Often, they formed part of a longer path that had been disaggregated into multiple shorter and separately-numbered sections. Furthermore, it was not until about halfway through the survey that the team acquired a copy of NYCC’s full list of paths. This rendered it possible to ascertain the full quota of paths in a parish. Prior to receiving this, the identification of paths was dependent on visual recognition of paths on the NYCC’s website map of PROWs. Consequently, most of the missing paths are to be found in the earliest parishes to be completed, though unfortunately five PROWs were missed in one parish after the list had been received. But, overall, the achieved percentage of paths (98.8%) means that there can be no doubt that the overall survey is highly representative of this part of Ryedale and is also highly representative of each of the individual parishes⁴.

Table 1 below shows the number of footpaths and bridleways that comprised the 1,565 total of PROWs in Ryedale⁵. Approximately, for every two paths there was one bridleway. However, this ratio varied considerably from parish to parish. Whereas in Pickering, for example, only 13 per cent of its PROWs were bridleways, in Malton, 41 per cent of its PROWs were bridleways.

Table 1 Disaggregation of PROWs by Type of Path

Type of PROW	N	%⁶
Footpath	1064	69
Bridleway	477	31
BOAT ⁷	5	0
TOTALS	1,546	100

³ The views expressed in this report are those of the Ryedale Group’s team of survey volunteers and not necessarily those of the Ramblers’ Association as a whole.

⁴ The parish with 5 paths missing had more than 50 PROWs in the survey, so even here more than 90% of the paths were covered by the survey.

⁵ Henceforth, unless otherwise stated, the term ‘Ryedale’ refers to that part of this District that lies outside the North York Moors National Park.

⁶ Rounded up or down.

⁷ Bye-ways open to all traffic.

As explained above, each of the PROWs were assigned a (1-4) grade that reflected the condition of the path when walked by the surveyors. As set out in Table 2, 63 per cent of Ryedale PROWs – approximately three in every five – presented no problems to the walkers. On the other hand, the surveyors found that 37 per cent of the paths – almost two in every five – posed at least one problem; these could be minor or serious problems or paths that were un-useable/ impassable; many had multiple problems. Around one in five (21 per cent) had minor problems. Worryingly, the problems were so bad in approximately one in ten (9 per cent) PROWs that they rendered the path completely un-useable or impassable.

Table 2 The number and percentages of PROWs with different condition grades

Condition Grades	N	%
1. No problems	973	63
2. Minor problems	328	21
3. Serious problems	102	7
4. Un-useable paths	143	9
TOTALS	1,546	100

Table 3 reveals that problems were more likely to be observed in footpaths than in bridleways. While 73 per cent of bridleways were adjudged to have no problems, the corresponding figure for footpaths was 59 per cent. Hence, compared to the 27 per cent of bridleways that exhibited problems, 41 per cent of footpaths presented problems. Most strikingly, footpaths were four times more likely than bridleways to be found to be un-useable / impassable: 12 per cent of footpaths fell into this most acute category compared to only three per cent of bridleways. There would seem to be several possible explanations for this finding: horse riding associations like the British Horse Society (BHS) are more successful at keeping bridleways open than walking groups; the fact that there are fewer bridleways may mean that they are used more than footpaths, over which walkers have a greater choice; the higher designation of bridleways may make it harder for uncooperative landowners to block them.

Table 3 Condition grades by two main types of PROWs

Condition Grades	Bridleways		Footpaths	
	N	%	N	%
1. No problems	346	73	625	59
2. Minor problems	97	20	228	21
3. Serious problems	18	4	84	8
4. Un-useable paths	16	3	127	12
TOTALS	477	100	1064	100

The condition of the PROWs was not uniformly consistent across all parts of Ryedale. Parishes differed a great deal in the extent to which their paths were problematic. While some parishes had many paths with problems, others had hardly any. Table 4 shows the 15 parishes that had the greatest number of paths that were recorded as having problems (i.e. those adjudged Grades 2, 3 and 4).

Table 4 Parishes with the highest number of problems

Parish (Number of paths)	Number of paths with problems
Pickering (100)	51
Malton (67)	34
Kirby Grindalythe (33)	26
Sheriff Hutton (71)	19
Burythorpe (22)	19
Normanby (44)	18
Habton (24)	18
Sherburn (24)	17
Heslerton (25)	17
Thornton-le-Dale (29)	16
Westow (23)	14
Scampston (32)	14
Nunnington (29)	12
Ebberston & Yedingham (25)	12
Kirkbymoorside (52)	11

It is interesting that two of the five main centres of population – Helmsley and Norton-on-Derwent – do not feature in this list. It would seem that this is because there are relatively few PROWs in these towns⁸ and a lower proportion have problems. This illustrates the

⁸ Many of the PROWs in Helmsley are managed by the North York Moors National Park.

limitation of this table: some parishes are included in the top 15 simply by virtue of the fact that they have a large number of PROWs, not because they have a high proportion of problems. Thus, although the data in Table 4 is useful for indicating parishes with a high concentration of problematic PROWs, an arguably more useful list would be those parishes with a high percentage of paths with problems relative to their total number of PROWs. These results are displayed in the next table.

Table 5 then shows the ten parishes with the highest percentage of paths with problems (Grades 2, 3 and 4). In order not to distort these results, parishes with fewer than five PROWs have been excluded from the list. There was one parish (Scrayingham) where every path had a problem. Almost all of the ten parishes in the table had more than two-thirds of its paths with problems.

Table 5 Parishes with the highest percentage of problems

Parish (Number of paths)	<i>% of paths with problems</i>
1. Scrayingham (9)	100
2. Burythorpe (22)	86
3. Barton-le-Willows (5)	80
4. Kirby Grindalythe (33)	79
5. Kirby Misperton (9)	78
6. Habton (24)	75
7. Sherburn (24)	71
8. Heslerton (25)	68
9. Brawby (12)	67
10. Ganton (8)	63

The above list reveals a number of interesting characteristics that may point to some of the reasons why such parishes have a disproportionately high share of problematic paths:

- none of the five main towns are included in the list;
- they tend to be small village-oriented parishes;
- nearly all of them are not tourist/ visitor honey pots (with the exception of Kirby Misperton);
- several of them are located in the eastern parts of Ryedale;
- none are to be found in the western or Howardian Hills region of Ryedale;
- there is an out-of-the-way feel to many of these parishes;
- and currently few of them could make claims for attracting significant numbers of visiting walkers and riders.

In view of these qualities, it is tempting to ask if the parishes with such high percentages of problems suffer from neglect by the body responsible for protecting and preserving the PROWs, namely the NYCC. Is the NYCC giving more attention and priority to paths in other areas (e.g. those with more visitors, the established trails and beauty spots) than those in village parishes that are a little more off the beaten track? If so, that would appear grossly unfair to the residents of such parishes.

So far we have only looked at how the frequency of problems in parishes was spread across Ryedale. We could also consider the parishes that were associated with a particular grade of problem, notably the most critical category, Grade 4. Accordingly, Table 6 shows the parishes with highest number of Grade 4 problems, i.e. paths that were impassable or un-useable. The Table gives the number of such paths in the parish, as well as the percentage this represented as a proportion of the total number of paths in that parish.

Table 6 Parishes with highest number of most acute problems

Parish (Number of paths)	N of paths with Grade 4 problems	<i>Grade 4 paths as % of all paths in parish</i>
Pickering (100)	14	14
Normanby (44)	10	23
Habton (24)	10	47
Westow (23)	7	30
Sherburn (24)	6	25
Brawby (12)	6	50
Thornton-le-Dale (29)	5	17
Scrayingham (9)	5	56
Salton (14)	5	36
Scampston (32)	4	13
Rillington (30)	4	13
Ebberston & Yedingham (25)	4	16
Barugh (15)	4	27

Pickering is the only one of the five main centres of population to appear in the above Table. It had more paths with the most severe category of problems than any other Ryedale parish. Compared to the 9 per cent average across all parishes (see Table 2), 14 per cent of Pickering paths were found to be Grade 4 PROWs – meaning that approximately one in seven of its paths were impassable or un-useable.

It is also of considerable concern that a number of other smaller parishes had much higher percentages of Grade 4 paths. Scrayingham, Brawby and Habton had very high percentages

of paths with totally disabling problems. It must be highly frustrating to walkers and riders living in or near these parishes to know or discover that around half of the PROWs in their parishes are impassable or non-existent.

Reviewing the evidence presented in the last three tables (Tables 4, 5 and 6), it is possible to identify some parishes that repeatedly figure in the lists of parishes with high numbers or percentages of problems, any category of problem or Grade 4 ones. These can be seen as Ryedale's 'black spots' for walking and riding. They comprise:

- Pickering
- Kirby Grindalythe
- Burythorpe
- Normanby
- Heslerton
- Thornton-le-Dale
- Westow
- Scampston
- Scrayingham
- Ebberston & Yedingham
- Brawby
- Habton
- Sherburn

Given the frequency and scale of their problems, the PROWs in all of these parishes warrant urgent attention, but the latter two in particular, Habton and Sherburn, which feature prominently in all three of the above tables, constitute special causes of concern.

But if these are the District's 'black spots', where are the 'gold star' places in Ryedale? Which parishes had PROWs that were open, accessible and problem-free? To answer this, Table 7 displays the percentage of paths with problems for the lowest-scoring parishes. As before, to avoid distorting the results, parishes with fewer than five PROWs have been excluded.

None of the five main towns had percentages low enough to qualify for inclusion in this Table – the lowest was Helmsley with 19 per cent. The seven parishes that top the Table did not have a single path with problems. The location of the ten parishes cited in Table 7 is very interesting. With the exception of Thorpe Bassett, they fall into two groups. Five of the parishes – Coneysthorpe, Henderskelfe, Welburn (near A64), Crambe and Leavening – all cluster around the south-eastern corner of the Howardian Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB), extending over the A64 towards the River Derwent. The four remaining parishes gather around the north-eastern corner of the same AONB, extending over towards

Kirkbymoorside. It is very noticeable that none are to be found in the parishes that inhabit the low-lying hinterland between Pickering and Malton nor in the low-lying swathes of land that stretch out towards the eastern boundaries of the District. Taken together, the findings suggest that ‘gold star’ parishes are more likely to be located in areas that are popular with visitors who walk and ride. The reverse would seem to be the case for the ‘black spot’ parishes. Is this because (a) PROWs stay open due to being walked and ridden more or (b) Council Path Officers (in this case NYCC) prioritise maintenance work in popular areas or (c) more landowners in popular areas expect a large demand of usage and so adopt a constructive approach to providing accessible paths?

Table 7 **Parishes with the lowest percentage of problems**

Parish (Number of paths)	<i>% of paths with problems</i>
Coneysthorpe (6)	0
Henderskelfe (18)	0
Leavening (7)	0
Oswaldkirk (5)	0
Sproxtton (7)	0
Thorpe Bassett (12)	0
Welburn (near Malton) (22)	0
Crambe (16)	6
Harome (15)	7
Welburn (near Kirkbymoorside) (15)	7

Thus far, although we have considered the survey’s findings with regard to the adjudged condition of the PROWs, we have not yet analysed or described the findings on the type of problems that the volunteers encountered on their walks. The forms required surveyors to give details of any problems that led them to award a path a Grade 2, 3 or 4. Their descriptions have been analysed by devising a coding frame of the different types of problems depicted and assigning codes that best matched their accounts. Very often, more than one code was allocated to each description. There were 12 codes or types of problem. Table 8 presents the number of times each of these 12 types of problem were mentioned in relation to footpaths and bridleways.

The most frequently mentioned problem – for both footpaths and bridleways, and hence overall – related to signposting. Almost a quarter (23 per cent) of all comments cited issues with signposts. Interestingly, inadequacies in signposting accounted for a larger share of the reported problems for bridleways (34 per cent) than for footpaths (20 per cent). For both types of PROW, signposting issues included missing signposts (which are legally required off all metalled roads), signposts that were overgrown or obscured by hedges and other vegetation, finger-posts that had fallen down or were in a poor state of repair and signposts

that were sited incorrectly. In some cases well-made and sound signposts were found lying on the ground, suggesting that they had been deliberately uprooted or knocked over. In all, we estimate that around 300 signposts⁹ were found to be missing or damaged in the part of Ryedale covered by this survey. Malton alone had 34 missing signposts. Such is the scale of the problem that NYCC need to be asked if they have abandoned their commitment to fulfil their statutory duty to provide a signpost for every PROW that adjoins a metalled road. If so, walking and riding groups may need to consider combining their resources to prosecute this Council for dereliction of its legal duty in regard to PROW signposting.

Table 8 The frequency with which different types of problem were identified in footpaths and bridleways

Type of Problem	Overall ¹⁰		Footpaths		Bridleways	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Signposts	255	23	178	20	74	34
Obstructions	149	13	130	14	19	9
Overgrown vegetation	137	12	107	12	29	13
Way-marking	124	11	97	11	26	12
Crops	105	9	93	10	12	6
Stiles, gates	104	9	86	10	18	8
No identifiable PROW	83	8	74	8	9	4
Terrain	42	4	32	4	10	5
Other problems	40	4	27	3	13	6
Diversion issues	38	4	33	4	5	2
Bridges	34	3	32	4	2	1
TOTALS	1,111	100	889	100	217	100

The second most frequently reported problem with paths related to obstructions. This type of problem formed a larger share of the identified issues for footpaths (14%) than for bridleways (9%). Hence, obstruction problems were more likely to be associated with footpaths than bridleways. Accounts of obstruction problems included:

- locked gates, often with chains and padlocks, including electronically operated security gate with keypad
- paths blocked by hedges, no gap in hedges to allow access
- barbed wire and/ or rope across entrances to paths
- paths obstructed by fences

⁹ This is more than the 255 comments, because some comments described problems with more than one signpost (e.g. they were missing at both ends of the path).

¹⁰ The totals of paths plus bridleway problems do not always sum to the overall totals because some problems were observed in the very small number of BOATs, which are not included here.

- PROWs completely blocked by vegetation and/ or crops
- paths obstructed by deep ditches
- fallen trees impeding way forward
- buildings (e.g. new feed silos) and farm equipment blocking the line of PROW
- piles of manure, hedge cuttings, garden waste, rubbish, bricks, asbestos or earth preventing access
- new gardens across rights of way
- kissing gates closed by nailing gate to support posts.

Sadly, it is all too obvious from the descriptions that the majority of the blocked paths had been obstructed deliberately. The regrettable reality is that there are many landowners in Ryedale who try, and unfortunately often succeed, in discouraging or preventing walkers and riders from traversing public rights of way. Given that the Highway Authority's fundamental duty is to protect the rights of the public and to take action against those that seek to interrupt those rights (e.g. by blocking PROWs), why is it that the NYCC is allowing an extremely high number of obstructed paths to remain in Ryedale? The 149 accounts of obstructed paths – and some of them were blocked in more than one place – amount to 10 per cent of all the PROWs in Ryedale. This means that if a walker plans a walk in Ryedale of moderate length, say 20 paths¹¹, she or he is likely to come across two paths that are completely blocked; and abatement is not always easy. It can result in frustrated walkers having to retrace their steps or go a long way out of their way in order to get to their destination. Given these quite shocking findings, it is difficult to give much credence to claims that the NYCC is protecting our paths in Ryedale.

The third most frequently cited problem related to overgrown vegetation. In some cases this was bad enough to totally block the path; in others, it made walking or riding difficult. Unlike the previous two types of problem, overgrown vegetation had the same likelihood of being found in footpaths as well as in bridleways. The problems encountered included headland paths that were un-walkable due to thick undergrowth and PROWs where overgrown with shrubs, bramble tendrils, blackthorn, hedges, weeds, nettles, hogweed or thistles. It is worth stressing that landowners have the responsibility for keeping paths clear of overhanging growth. Once cleared, the paths would then benefit from being walked and ridden regularly. Clearly, walking and riding groups have a key role to play in ensuring that the less-trod footpaths and bridleways are used so that the undergrowth can be held at bay. It is pertinent to ask if local walking and riding groups could do more than is their current practice to guarantee that all footpaths and bridleways in a given area are walked at least once in a given period.

The lack of way-markers (as distinct from signposts off metalled roads) on footpaths and bridleways received only marginally fewer comments than overgrown vegetation. Way-

¹¹ Normally, this is not a large quantity since many of the longer paths are broken down into smaller units, each with its own PROW number.

marking was clearly important to the volunteer walkers and not only because these relatively simple directional signs helped with navigation. In particular, they also help walkers and riders avoid trespassing on land for which there is no right of way and by providing clear directions through complex properties (such as farm buildings) avert the chances of disturbing landowners and their families and staff. In some situations way-markers make an essential contribution to health and safety. Yet, it was precisely in some of these contexts that way-marking was found to be absent: for example, no or insufficient way-marking was identified in industrial plants, golf courses, theme park/zoo and quarries – all of which presented clear health and safety hazards to walkers and riders. In addition to absent way-markers, there were others that were rotting on the ground or leaning over on the verge of falling.

Three further categories of problem types appear in the middle band of Table 8: crops (n = 105); stiles and gates (n = 104); and no identifiable PROW (n= 83). With regard to crops, it may be noted that farmers may plough out hard-to-avoid cross-field footpaths and bridleways, providing that they are re-instated within 24 hours or up to two weeks if this is the first disturbance for a particular crop. Furthermore, the farmer must not allow any crop obstruction of the PROW other than grass. In the survey the reports of cropping problems described paths that had been cropped over with crops other than grass or had been ploughed out for more than two weeks without being re-instated; although, because most paths were walked once only and it was not possible to monitor this over time, few reports of ploughing out problems per se could be made. Hence, the vast majority of these 105 accounts referred to field paths that had been cultivated with crops that did not permit free access (e.g. *'path crosses a field of rape and is at present impassable'*, *'photo taken further along where beet was growing on line of path'*, *'path OK until over the Sherburn Cut then way blocked by potato crop which we struggled over'* and *'long stretch of cross field path not re-instated so too muddy to go across - took abatement by using field edge but dangerous because of deep rabbit burrows which have caused the bank to collapse in places'*. Once again, with 7 per cent of all Ryedale PROWs displaying this type of problem, there seemed little evidence of effective enforcement of the law on paths across fields that are ploughed or cultivated with crops.

Roughly the same number of reports focused on problems with stiles and gates. These problems included:

- stiles, kissing gates or gates in a poor state of repair, rotting, broken, collapsed, demolished
- gate fasteners that were suitable for walkers but not riders on horseback
- gates difficult to open, gates tied with rope or twine, no latches – *'gate is actually a hurdle and only way to pass is to lay it flat and try re-position it after passing over it'*

- stiles and gates that were unsafe, unstable and dangerous (e.g. *'rusty broken lower rail stabbed me in leg as I was struggling to shut gate'*, *'solid kissing gate on footpath that swings both ways - could cause injury to small children (head height). No stop on gate so it swings both ways unexpectedly - repair needed'*, *'barbed wire across top of stile'*).
- kissing gates wired up and nailed fast, gates jammed shut, stiles with electric wire to stop horses eating wood
- missing stiles over fences or through hedges

Clearly, Ryedale's landowners and farmers, working in partnership with the NYCC, have much to do to improve the provision of satisfactory gates, stiles and kissing gates.

Five per cent of Ryedale PROWs (n = 83) are phantom paths – they exist only on the definitive map or the NYCC website of PROWs. On the ground volunteers could find no or little trace of them. Some descriptions from the surveyors illustrate the range of problems identified under this category:

- *'Path becomes indistinct through wood and eventually disappears.'*
- *'No footpath sign and no stile at [X]. Lady living there for 61 years has never seen path used.'*
- *'No way mark at this point. No sign of a path on the ground which leads into thick undergrowth. No finger post. No evidence of an extant path.'*
- *'No sign - although it is at the moment a 'dead end' path there may be some evidence that it has been wrongly recorded as such as the path ends at the parish boundary. The path is overgrown with small seedling blackthorns - photos taken. Is this the end of the path? Photos taken of impenetrable hedge but it doesn't look to be in the same place as on OS map. On the enlarged NYCC map it looks as if path crosses ditch into next field and continues past the hedge but there was no indication on the ground.'*
- *'Access to path no longer exists. Original path appears to have gone through drive of house opposite pub. We spoke to householder who said path no longer existed!'*
- *No indication that this path exists - plenty of gaps in hedge alongside path 8/1 and 8/2 cross field route not indicated and no way through thick high hedge at place where Parish Boundary and roadside meet (photo taken) Resident ... was completely unaware of the existence of footpath 7/1.*
- *'Path is not visible due to all the tarmac roads from Flamingoland.'*

- *'Boarded fence and private garden built over right of way. Abated by climbing under fence on adjacent land. No evidence of footpath.'*
- *'This path has been un-walkable for many years and is fenced off. There is no footpath sign from the northern road end. In 2006/7 I reported the path to NYCC as part of the 'Use Your paths' survey: "The north-south running path ... is blocked at the first hedge with barbed wire. It is also overgrown and is not sign-posted. A man from the house .. told me that there was no right of way down this path. When I showed him it on the map, he maintained that this was the first he had heard of it and the 'civil servants' drawing the map had got it wrong. In reply NYCC informed me that "this was a low priority problem, since the path did not lead anywhere¹²."*
- *'Could not find this path – no signs – no clues – believe it goes through the yard of a councillor, as a local was giving me information – he says the landowners are deliberately removing signs as they don't like walkers.'*
- *'Couldn't find this footpath at all! Corner has been extensively developed – has the path been legally extinguished?'*
- *'No footpath sign , no clear indication of where path begins as most entrances to field blocked by thorn bushes. One possible entrance roughly where footpath supposed to start is blocked by a 3 foot high fence but even if one clambers over the fence, the other side of the fence is a cropped field with no indication of any footpath.'*

Running through these extracts are a number of themes that often seem to have a bearing on whether paths survive or disappear. For instance, the last extract points to a common trend: where the repeated ploughing out and cropping of a field path is coupled with the absence, or more likely the removal, of a signpost and the barring of access, visible signs of PROWs on the ground can easily disappear quite quickly. For these reasons, replacing signposts accompanied by the strict enforcement of the law on ploughing and cropping in relation to rights of way should be a high priority for Councils. The problem of vanishing PROWs is often associated with dead-end paths, though it should be recognised that these also warrant protection and that they can still provide pleasure and exercise for local walks, perhaps dog walking. A number of the extracts highlighted the dangers of PROWs disappearing due to building developments at both private residential properties and business sites, again signalling a lack of adequate enforcement. Another frequent refrain in the accounts of problems was the apparent paucity of people walking or riding many of the phantom paths, perhaps underlining again the important role that walking groups could play in ensuring that attempts continue to be made to walk and ride paths less taken.

¹² It may be noted that several paths, particularly in the former East Riding, stop at parish boundaries due to unresolved or unclaimed continuation paths.

Returning to Table 8, we can see that the types of problem less frequently cited were terrain (n = 42), other (n = 40), diversion issues (n = 38) and bridges (n = 34). With regard to terrain, the problems often centred on paths being churned up and deeply rutted by heavy forestry, construction or agricultural traffic. A few comments contained requests for steps down slippery banks, some with becks at the bottom. In one case, steps were in place but they had rotted and were considered dangerous. Another referred to the difficulties climbing out of a steep ditch. Others described paths becoming flooded, waterlogged or too muddy to walk. In some places paths were showing signs of erosion and becoming too narrow and dangerous to walk.

The most frequently mentioned issue in the 'other' type of problem category included accounts of footpaths and bridleways that were too narrow. In one case, for example, a bridleway through a field of barley had been cut to a width of 1 metre, when the specification on the Diversion Order was for a bridleway of 3 metres wide. One report noted that a footpath was being used by horse riders and the path was being churned up as a result; another described how cyclists and horse-riders were using a footpath illegally. With obvious risks to horse and rider, another cited a crow scaring canon that had been placed directly on a bridleway. There were also two accounts of volunteers who were denied access to PROWs by the residents of properties through which the paths passed. The 'other' category also included references to illegal or deliberately misleading signs that were put up to deter walkers and riders (e.g. 'Private Gallops' on entrance to a public bridleway; 'High Health Pigs ... No Entry' on entrance to another public bridleway; 'No public right of way beyond this point' at the access point to a PROW). There were also comments that called for the installation of new or repaired signs to warn walkers and riders of dangers (e.g. paths around a golf course), or to assert the existence of a public right of way where landowners have placed signs or intimidating gates that could imply that there is not.

The 'diversion issue' type of problem covered reports of difficulties encountered due to paths being the subject of a diversion application process or cases where the volunteer affirmed that, or queried whether, illegal and unofficial diversions had been made (e.g. *'illegal diversion due to small planting of trees surrounded by rabbit fencing'* and *'farmer has obstructed the footpath with a large amount of manure. Photo taken. Is this an official diversion to the other side of the hedge?'*). Questions were also raised about whether maps accurately reflected the decisions of diversion orders that had already been implemented on the ground. Specific comments centred on the need for diversion notices and associated re-routed way-markers to be displayed better; inadequate compliance with diversion orders; temporary path closures, for which, in some situations, the notices had expired; and claims from landowners that paths had been closed and struck off the definitive map with the agreement of the NYCC.

Table 8 shows that the type of problem with the lowest number of references concerned difficulties with bridges. These comments included:

- bridges that were completely missing (55 per cent of all reports on bridges);
- bridges that existed but were deemed dangerous (21 per cent of all reports on bridges);
- bridges that needed repairing but not considered to be a risk (21 per cent of all reports on bridges); and
- bridges that were overgrown with vegetation (3 per cent of all reports on bridges).

Clearly, the main issues here are paths that should have bridges but do not and paths that have them but they are judged to be a risk to the health and safety of walkers, riders and horses. The geographical location of the paths with bridge problems is interesting. They tended to fall into four clusters. The first – and the one with the largest number of reported bridge problems (41 per cent of them) – was a group that lay to the south-west of Pickering and just to the west of the A169 Pickering – Malton road, stretching from Riseborough Bridge/Pickering down through Normanby/ Kirby Misperton to Great Habton. This was certainly a black spot for bridges in Ryedale. Another area with significant difficulties was a cluster of eight places (24 per cent) with bridge problems that centred on Low Hutton, Leavening, Barton-le Willows, Sheriff Hutton and Bulmer. A third group with five problems (15 per cent) ran in a straight line from south of Wilton to Sherburn. A further four places (12 per cent) with bridge problems were to be found in a circle around Nunnington, Stonegrave and Salton.

But the issues associated with bridge problems are interesting for another reason. Although they are small in number, problems with bridges, especially their complete absence, may have an enormous impact on whether or not a path can be walked or ridden. Indeed, the survey demonstrated that the issue of bridges was one of three types of problem that were heavily influential on paths being assigned the un-useable category (Grade 4). The other two problem types were obstructions and non-identifiable paths. These results are presented in Table 9, which shows the number of times, and percentages, with which different types of problem were reported in paths adjudged to be Condition Grade 4. The findings are consistent with the view that obstructions and the lack of bridges are key determinants of paths becoming un-useable and unidentifiable. It is for these reasons that strenuous efforts should be made and high priority ratings applied in order to ensure that footpaths and bridleways do not become a casualty to these two particular problems.

Table 9 The frequency and percentages with which different types of problem were identified in paths adjudged to be Condition Grade 4

	N in Grade 4 Paths	N Overall	%
Obstructions	99	149	66
Bridges	21	34	62
No identifiable PROW	46	83	55
Diversion issues	15	38	39
Crops	37	105	35
Overgrown vegetation	43	137	31
Way-marking	36	124	29
Stiles, gates	28	104	27
Signposts	59	255	23
Terrain	7	42	17

Having set out the results of the survey, we can return to the questions posed at the outset. Is Ryedale making the most of its extensive network of footpaths and bridleways and are residents and visitors who want to walk and ride finding these paths open, easy to find and accessible? On the basis of the evidence set out above, it is very hard to give an affirmative answer to these questions. The survey found that almost two in every five paths presented at least one problem, with many having multiple problems. In approximately one in ten PROWs the problems were so severe that they rendered the path completely un-useable or impassable. Problematic paths were not spread uniformly across Ryedale and the survey revealed several black-spot parishes that had a high proportion of paths with problems and/or a high concentration of paths with the most serious level of problems. Many of the parishes with highest percentages of paths with problems were villages that could be described as off the beaten track (e.g. Habton and Sherburn), though not all could be so described (e.g. Pickering, Thornton-le-Dale). The problem most often identified related to signposting and across Ryedale around 300 signposts that are a statutory requirement were found to be missing or damaged. The survey showed that the second most frequently reported type of problem concerned obstructions – a shocking catalogue of different kinds of obstruction was portrayed by the path surveyors. Regrettably, it was all too obvious from their descriptions that most of the blocked paths had been obstructed deliberately. One in ten of all paths in Ryedale were blocked. Other commonly cited problems with paths in this District included overgrown vegetation, a lack of way-marking, paths being ploughed out and cropped over, and inadequate and sometimes dangerous stiles and gates. The survey evidence also demonstrated that the blocking of paths and the lack of bridges were key determinants of Ryedale’s PROWs becoming un-useable and unidentifiable. In short, Ryedale’s paths are in a parlous state. In view of this, it is difficult to see how the Authority

charged with the task of protecting and preserving footpaths and bridleways in this part of Ryedale – the NYCC – can claim to be fulfilling its role.

Additionally, in order to assess in full whether Ryedale's paths are being looked after properly, we need to examine how the state of its PROWs has changed over time (historical data) and how its PROWs compare with those managed by neighbouring authorities (comparative data).

With regard to historical data, it could be the case, for example, that three years ago the conditions of its paths were even worse, suggesting perhaps that the NYCC and landowners can take credit for the improvements that have been achieved since then. Unfortunately, the comparable historical data that is needed to allow us to scrutinise this possibility is not yet available. Anecdotally, however, most of the survey volunteers, many of whom have walked Ryedale's paths over numerous years, felt very strongly that the condition of its footpaths and bridleways had deteriorated significantly. Moreover, the evidence from the Rambler's 'Use Your Paths' Survey (conducted in 2006 and 2007) indicates that most of the problems identified then, especially the more serious ones, had not been rectified by the time the current survey was undertaken. In addition, many new problems had surfaced.

With reference to the comparative evidence, we need to contrast the state of Ryedale's PROWs that are managed by NYCC with those that are managed by a neighbouring authority. To this end, in 2015 the Ryedale PROW Survey was extended to include a number of comparative case studies. Accordingly, a group of the same survey volunteers used exactly the same methods to walk, observe and grade the PROWs that are managed by the North York Moors National Park (NYMNP) in five Ryedale parishes¹³. All of these five parishes had some of their PROWs managed by NYCC and others by the NYMNP. The sample of parishes was chosen by counting all the NYMNP PROWS in Ryedale parishes that had paths that were managed by both authorities and selecting those that offered the sufficient numbers to allow comparison. The state of the NYMNP-managed paths was unknown at the point of selecting the sample. In total, 103 PROWs were walked and surveyed during March and April 2015. The evidence collected from this extension allowed us to compare Ryedale NYMNP-managed PROWs with Ryedale NYCC-managed PROWs, both within the sample of five parishes and as averages across Ryedale as a whole. The results and comparisons are interesting.

Earlier in the report we have described how across Ryedale as a whole, the proportion of NYCC-managed paths that were found to have at least one problem was 37 per cent. The comparable proportion for NYMNP-managed paths in the five Ryedale parishes was 22 per cent. Hence, the rate at which PROWs presented problems was significantly lower in NYMNP-managed areas. The results are even more striking if the comparison is restricted to

¹³ Allerston, Ampleforth, Ebberston, Helmsley and Thornton-le-Dale.

the five particular parishes. In four of the five parishes, there was a higher percentage of paths with problems among NYCC-managed PROWs than among NYMNP-managed PROWs (e.g. Allerston NYCC-managed PROWs had 56 per cent compared to NYMNP-managed PROWs with 11 per cent). The only parish which reversed this trend was Helmsley (19 per cent among NYCC-managed PROWs compared to 26 per cent among NYMNP-managed PROWs). Across the sample of five parishes, 44 per cent of NYCC-managed paths presented at least one problem. This contrasts with 22 per cent of NYMNP-managed paths. Thus, in these five parishes a walker or rider was twice as likely to encounter a problem with footpaths or bridleways in NYCC-managed areas than in NYMNP-managed areas.

But the rate at which problems occurred was only one difference between the two managing authorities; another was the level of the observed problems. As reported earlier, in the NYCC-managed parts of Ryedale (covering most paths in the District) virtually one in ten PROWs (9 per cent) were assigned a Grade 4 – signifying paths that were un-useable. Out of the 103 PROWs in the NYMNP-managed area, none had problems serious enough to be designated a Grade 4. Reinforcing this comparison, 11 PROWs in the NYCC-managed PROWs in the sample of five parishes were deemed to be Grade 4 and un-useable. At the other end of the spectrum, Grade 2 categories (relatively minor problems) formed a greater percentage of the paths with problems in NYMNP-managed areas than in NYCC-managed areas (61 per cent compared to 42 per cent). In short, paths with problems in NYCC-managed areas were more likely to present more serious difficulties than in those in NYMNP-managed areas.

The profile of the types of problems identified by the survey team displayed very pronounced differences between the two authorities. Among the NYMNP-managed paths, the most frequently-cited problems (20 out of 29 or 69 per cent) centred on two (comparatively less critical) types: terrain (e.g. waterlogged paths) and way-marking difficulties. In stark contrast, in the NYCC-managed areas of Ryedale these two types accounted for only 15 per cent of the problem types (166 out of 1111). Furthermore, among NYCC PROWs, the two most commonly recorded types of problem were signposting (255 out of 1111 or 23 per cent) and obstructions (149 out of 1111 or 13 per cent). Most significantly, the corresponding figures for the NYMNP sample were signposting (1 out of 29 or 3 per cent) and obstructions (2 out of 29 or 7 per cent). Additionally, the problem of ploughing out and cropping was far more prevalent in the NYCC-managed areas than the NYMNP ones (9 per cent in the former compared to 3 per cent in the latter). Consequently, the data show that, compared to the NYCC, the NYMNP are much more successful in restricting path problems to less critical difficulties (e.g. way-marking and terrain issues), in meeting their statutory responsibilities to provide signposts off metalled roads and in ensuring landowner's co-operation with regard to obstructions, ploughing out and cropping. With regard to the latter problem types, the results are consistent with the view that NYCC is especially weak in enforcing rights of way requirements with landowners.

To sum up the findings of the survey extension, the results clearly indicate that the NYCC is less effective than the NYMNP in that the NYCC-managed PROWS displayed:

- a higher percentage of paths presenting at least one problem;
- a greater likelihood of more paths with the most serious and debilitating problems;
- and much higher proportions of paths lacking statutory signposting and paths that are blighted by obstructions, cropping and ploughing out.

Very evidently, NYCC has a lot of catching up to do. The first steps in addressing the many problems identified in this research should be a thorough examination and review of the current policies for the protection and preservation of Ryedale's paths.

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