

‘In All Our Footsteps’: access to the land in historical perspective

Glen O'Hara | 02 December 2024

Executive Summary

- The new Labour government wants to encourage access to ‘the outdoors’, but this policy aim can be cast in quite stereotypical or negative terms.
- Labour has innovated on this front before, in legislation passed in 1949, 1968 and 2000, and the future course of policy should at least be guided by past experience.
- Delivering change ‘on the ground’ will be harder than declaring it legally or trying to make it work administratively: it could take many years for Labour to make a quantitative difference.
- Narrative and ‘story-telling’ will be very important in forging a new idea of access, especially if the aim is to attract previously excluded groups.
- The Government should focus on local and regional access, rather than abstract and unrealistic notions of long-distance ‘walking’.
- More accessible rights of way will be needed of all types, so that all citizens can feel included in the system, and new technology can be harnessed to assist in giving a sense of what access is really like in each part of the country.
- Voluntary, charitable and civic groups should become key partners in the making and upkeep of paths and tracks of all sorts.

Introduction

The election of a Labour government must be a time to take stock of its objectives and likely methods. Nowhere is this more so than in terms of access to nature, an area where Labour has a long record of opening up the land to the public, and now wishes to make new moves forward.

In its 2024 Manifesto (<https://labour.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/Change-Labour-Party-Manifesto-2024-large-print.pdf>), Labour committed only to ‘create nine new National River Walks, one in each region of England, and establish three new National Forests in England, whilst planting millions of trees and creating new woodlands’.

As with so much else about Sir Keir Starmer’s Labour Party, however, this is a very cautious but achievable agenda still intended to demonstrate a direction of travel and some later ambition. Other ideas, such as an Access to Nature White Paper, are still circulating (<https://www.ramblers.org.uk/news/new-government-new-opportunity-access>), though the party has retreated somewhat (<https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2023/oct/25/labour-u-turns-on-promise-of-scottish-style-right-to-roam-in-england>) from its earlier plans for a more general ‘right to roam’ on Scottish or Nordic lines. Still, the question of land access remains an open one, as central government reviews how rights of way work (<https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2023/mar/22/government-accused-u-turn-england-footpath-promise>) and think tanks suggest the creation of new national trails (<https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2024/nov/21/call-for-east-of-england-coast-trail-to-address-access-to-nature-gap>).

This is related to Labour’s strategic aim of reducing the burden of ill health (<https://portland-communications.com/public-affairs/wes-streeting-a-man-with-a-plan/>) on the medical system via proactive and preventive action, but the party is also reacting to public pressure. The Covid-19 pandemic saw many people take to the outdoors as the only way they could exercise or socialise. Groups who have previously felt excluded or unwelcome (https://www.cpre.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/August-2021_Access-to-nature-in-the-English-countryside_research-overview.pdf) have been pushing for more access, and more equity in who is able to get outside: Black Girls Hike (<https://www.bghuk.com/>) is just one example.

Over the past four years, the Arts and Humanities Research Council-funded project entitled ‘In All Our Footsteps: Tracking, Mapping and Experiencing Rights of Way in Post-War Britain (<https://www.allourfootsteps.uk/>)’, based at Oxford Brookes and Newcastle Universities, has uncovered a rich seam of evidence about rights of way and access that might suggest how to move forward, as well as some approaches that might be less successful.

Mapping as a problem of governance

The first lesson for policymakers is that intent does not always meet reality, even in cases where central government is in charge of domestic policy and can (for the most part) make its writ run throughout the country. Laws and orders emanating from Westminster and Whitehall can only go so far (<https://static1.squarespace.com/static/617aa9517441095f0e9c7812/t/66e29b66a5b4ed3f87a30f29/1726126957483/Mapping+rights+of+way.pdf>) – and often, not very far at all.

The makers of the 1949 National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act (<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/Geo6/12-13-14/97>) thought that they could designate all the rights of way in England and Wales rather quickly – all the better to help rebuild the country after the war, and of a piece with an increased emphasis on wellbeing and openness. County Councils, the main reporting authorities, were to make initial surveys within three years. In practice, this proved a wildly optimistic estimate, and work on some definitive maps was still ongoing well into the 1970s.

The parishes which were given the job of reporting to counties were often not very well-prepared for the job, or faced local opposition – often from powerful landowners. The rights of way network was very complicated, full of overlapping ownership, duties of care and legal responsibilities. Different categories of footpaths, bridleways, byways and ‘roads used as public paths’ were hard to understand and classify, and their type and density varied by enormous amounts both across the country and even within individual parts of the country (<https://www.allourfootsteps.uk/newwriting/esses-rights-of-way>) – a fact that often discomfited counties when they received maps that seemed extremely partial and sometimes uneven.

All in all, the need to make realistic plans, grounded not just in ambition but also within the bounds of administrative manpower and governing capacity, is a very clear historical lesson from this case. Far too often, actually making policies stick once they have been put forward by Ministers and passed by Parliament is seen as a frictionless and costless endeavour left out of the story of how change is actually delivered. The history of land access and rights of way shows that it is often

what happens after Cabinet and Parliament have decided what to do that makes all the difference.

That said, the definitive map of public access pathways itself is now a standing reality, and has become a key legal fact on the ground (<https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5a80d867e5274a2e8ab527d5/definitive-map-guide.pdf>), not just enforceable at law but also imagined as permanent and characteristic of national practice. It would now be near-impossible to go back on the way these maps have been made for England and Wales since 1949. It would be too politically controversial, too time-consuming and distracting for central and local government, and affront the imagined sense of nation and place that these ribbons of access on the landscape encode.

In this sense, the rights of way system set up in 1949 exhibits both the fragility and the power of national policy. The very long period before systematic delivery, and the fights that (<https://campaignerkate.wordpress.com/the-framfield-footpath-story/>) continuously break (<https://campaignerkate.wordpress.com/the-framfield-footpath-story/>) out (<https://campaignerkate.wordpress.com/the-framfield-footpath-story/>) over the course of many rights of way, show how difficult the post-war British state found it to chart a course towards an orderly and managed type of access. At a time when much about British governance seems enfeebled or hollowed out, the parallels with contemporary dilemmas are obvious.

But the fact remains that the post-war Labour government *did* legislate, laying down a set of principles and objectives, and it was in the end able to get a process going that led to a national rights of way map. The upshot is perhaps that the final delivery of your policies may take a very long time, but that the British state can get there in the end.

One last point to make on delivery is the importance of new technology. Mapping (and following maps) has now been automated through the use of Global Positioning System technology; the use of the Ordnance Survey apps and maps online (<https://shop.ordnancesurvey.co.uk/maps/os-maps-subscriptions/>) has become normalised, and the vast majority of local mapping authorities now make their data available electronically. Much more use of this technology in the making and dissemination of our definitive maps should be deployed.

There has been a new digital fast stream recruitment into the civil service since 2014. As Labour now considers how to reshape the public sector for a new era, this is an obvious area where the UK authorities could use new technology – not to transform or revolutionise, as some grandiose declarations imagine, but certainly to allow much better communication, co-operation and policy assessment.

Rights of way as citizenship

Paths are also about identity, place and belonging – how citizens see themselves (<https://static1.squarespace.com/static/617aa9517441095f0e9c7812/t/66e29b180910e856a0dc8775/1726126879833/Citizenship.pdf>), their rights, their surroundings and even their country. The systemisation of the rights of way network England and Wales has witnessed over the last 75 years, and the vastly increased emphasis on their use, has come at a time when those ideas have been in flux – and in halting steps forward at particular moments of change.

The 1949 Act was made at a time when planning was the overarching popular idea driving British governance. New Towns would house the people, moving them away from cities; all development rights and gains would be nationalised; the National Health Service and the welfare state would look after everyone, both then and in the (planned) future; and National Parks and guaranteed rights of way would provide for the people's right to access 'the countryside'.

In the 1960s, the idea took hold that more free time and increased spending power meant citizens were looking for more hobbies and more places to visit. What they needed was more parking spaces to take account of increased automobilism, more Country Parks near cities and towns, and better signage and easy trails for short walks, were all key parts of Labour's Countryside Act of 1968 (<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1968/41>).

Then again, as the idea of *positive* citizenship took hold in the 1990s and 2000s, both Conservative and Labour governments passed measures to place active duties on local councils and other authorities to make sure that everyone could enjoy rights of way. The Disability Discrimination Act of 1995 (<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1995/50/contents/enacted>), the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 (<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2000/37/contents>) and the Equality Act 2010 (<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2010/15/contents>) are all vitally important waymarkers on that journey.

Work underway right now reflects that new emphasis on making real space for all, rather than simply removing barriers. Voluntary groups such as the Muslim Hikers (<https://muslimhikers.com/>) are making sure that previously under-represented or marginalised groups are seen anew in the countryside; accessible paths are more and more to the fore (<https://www.cpre.org.uk/stories/access-all-areas-making-the-countryside-more-inclusive/>), for instance on land owned by the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds; there are attempts to remove or change stiles (<https://www.allourfootsteps.uk/newwriting/a-question-of-stile-part-two-stiles-and-accessibility>) and other types of impediment to access where they are not really needed.

Underneath all that, having rights of access guaranteed – whether on paths, byways, tracks or on open land – resonated with certain ideas of 'the nation' that were persistent. The concept that the land belonged to 'the people', critical in inter-war movements for access to the outdoors, ran through the whole era. The system that did emerge was also thought to be a workable compromise or 'middle way' familiar in Britain's self-image, a concept that was important for instance in the making of the 2000 Act, which traded a general right to roam for more ways in which landowners could divert rights of way (<https://www.allourfootsteps.uk/newwriting/a-once-in-a-generation-opportunity-new-labour-and-the-right-to-roam>).

All of this shows that changing views of what it is to be a citizen are critical to the success and continued popularity of rights of way. Whether they represent the attractions of the planned, leisured or open society, this individual policy has to be underpinned by a more general sense of the Government's view of the world and its objectives.

So Labour will now have to ask itself: what is it that we really want to say and express with our new rights of way and access? The Government's basic objectives, to open up all sorts of different landscapes to improve citizens' physical and mental health (<https://randd.defra.gov.uk/ProjectDetails?ProjectId=20772>), cannot of course be gainsaid. But what is that *for*, beyond saving money for a beleaguered NHS? What is the vision of country and place that is most critically involved? These will be vital questions that will help decide the popularity and appeal, but also the perceived success or failure, of new access initiatives.

Guarantors of health and wellbeing?

If ideas about citizenship have always been important, the concepts of 'fresh air' and 'vigorous exercise' (<https://static1.squarespace.com/static/617aa9517441095f0e9c7812/t/66e29b4563bf8323ad22e2c0/1726126924058/Healthy+Ways.pdf>) have also been constants (<https://static1.squarespace.com/static/617aa9517441095f0e9c7812/t/66e29b4563bf8323ad22e2c0/1726126924058/Healthy+Ways.pdf>). In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries Britain, as the first country in the world to truly industrialise and urbanise, suffered from enormous pollution and ill-health among its new working classes. Urban governments wanted to give 'the people' something to do, and getting 'outside', beyond the confines of smoke, smog and water full of refuse and excreta, was undoubtedly appealing.

Paths out of city and town were also markers of at least some disposable income, and as time went by, 'gentility' too. The idea of Public Walks rose to its peak in the earlier nineteenth century: places where one could move out into surrounding fields, get around the enclosure of many areas of the country, and most of all (inside cities and towns) enjoy air free of the 'miasma' thought to cause disease.

All this was part of the idea of the 'new citizen' between the 1930s and 1950s: people who were healthier, more independent of mind and body, freed from the fears of physical and moral decline that haunted conservatives, liberals and socialists alike. Needless to say, that left behind many people who did not fit with those ideals – people with health conditions or impairments, the 'feckless' poor, the supposedly inferior. But all this raised up an ideal of a rambling, tramping, independent people who knew how to get to and breathe the clean, fresh air that was best for them.

That in turn led to the creation of spontaneous and voluntary bodies designed to get people outdoors, from the Co-Operative Holidays Association, (<https://www.hfholidays.co.uk/about-us/about-hf-holidays/timeline>) Holiday Fellowship (<https://www.hfholidays.co.uk/about-us/about-hf-holidays/timeline>) or socialist rambling groups to the growth of the Ramblers Association itself. All of them showed what the charitable or third sector could do to buttress state policy long before those ideas became popular in the early twenty-first century, as first New Labour and then the Conservatives experimented with policies designed to rejuvenate civic society.

The way in which the 'outdoors' became identified with 'the countryside' did, however, have less positive consequences. When thinking about or advertising walking as a hobby, the figure of the capable lone Rambler, usually a white middle-aged man, was most notable. He was pictured in huge green landscapes that appealed to the idea of England and Wales as a 'green and pleasant land', rather than what it was and is: a densely-populated country where most people live in cities, suburbs or large towns.

This has meant that much of the policy emphasis has been on very large outdoor spaces, not the pockets of green that could perhaps be stitched together to provide movement through built-up areas, as in the example (for instance) of (<https://tfl.gov.uk/modes/walking/green-link-walk#:~:text=The%2015%2Dmile%20Green%20Link,Walk%20and%20the%20Thames%20Path>) London's Green Link Walk (<https://tfl.gov.uk/modes/walking/green-link-walk#:~:text=The%2015%2Dmile%20Green%20Link,Walk%20and%20the%20Thames%20Path>).

Privileging the spectacular – such as the National Parks in the 1949 Act or mountain, heath and downland in the 2000 legislation – means that we have not thought about 'fresh air' near where people actually live, rather than people moving to it, and the better access they need once there. Nor has the provision of public parks kept up with the re-densification of our cities. We know from surveys that in 2020 only 57% of adults in Britain said they lived within five minutes of a green space; and only a minority of Black, Asian or Minority Ethnic Britons or households with an income below £15,000 a year (https://cdn.ramblers.org.uk/media/files/ramblers-access-nature-11_0.pdf) were able to get to a field, park or canal nearby (https://cdn.ramblers.org.uk/media/files/ramblers-access-nature-11_0.pdf).

Here too the new government must ask fundamental questions. How can central government encourage an emphasis on small-scale and local rights of way that are actually used in everyday ways by urban residents, and which could perhaps be joined up to allow better movement across and between places where people actually live? How might the older and more deprived communities living on England's coasts use part of (<https://www.allourfootsteps.uk/newwriting/england-coast-path>) the new England Coast Path (<https://www.allourfootsteps.uk/newwriting/england-coast-path>), or the more well-established (<https://www.walescoastpath.gov.uk/?lang=en>) Wales Coast Path (<https://www.walescoastpath.gov.uk/?lang=en>)? To what extent can transport policy and more imaginative planning solutions help, especially at a time when the Government is likely to only have small amounts of money to spend? These apparently small-scale questions can look as large as huge themes such as 'citizenship', once one looks at the problem of better lives lived at the grassroots level.

Making the outdoors accessible for all

If we turn to outdoor access more specifically, the new Labour government has definite and declared aims to help people move and get outside – not least because of the physical and mental health benefits (<https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/tips-for-everyday-living/nature-and-mental-health/how-nature-benefits-mental-health/>) involved at a time when the population has been suffering from more chronic illnesses and is ageing appreciably. They will now have to back this up with concrete policy moves.

A large proportion of the people of England and Wales, indeed ([https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/healthandsocialcare/healthandwellbeing/bulletins/disabilityenglandandwales/census2021#:~:text=In%20En\(23.4%25%2C%20696%2C000\).](https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/healthandsocialcare/healthandwellbeing/bulletins/disabilityenglandandwales/census2021#:~:text=In%20En(23.4%25%2C%20696%2C000).)) nearly a fifth of the population ([https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/healthandsocialcare/healthandwellbeing/bulletins/disabilityenglandandwales/census2021#:~:text=In%20En\(23.4%25%2C%20696%2C000\).](https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/healthandsocialcare/healthandwellbeing/bulletins/disabilityenglandandwales/census2021#:~:text=In%20En(23.4%25%2C%20696%2C000).)), experience some type of disability. Improving the accessibility of the English and Welsh rights of way network will be essential not only in terms of health benefits, but to enable everyone to enjoy a full and fulfilling part of citizenship in our society.

This has always been a challenge, but it has always been possible (<https://static1.squarespace.com/static/617aa9517441095f0e9c7812/t/66e29ae8c3d15d4a22f0536d/1726126829584/Accessible+Ways.pdf>) – witness the role of injured military personnel between the two World Wars, publicising how much they could do, rather than what they could not do. Electric wheelchairs and electric scooters have been making access easier for people with mobility-related impairments since the 1950s and 1960s, while the Chronically Sick and Disabled Persons Act of 1970 enshrined the right of access of 'invalid carriages' to the rights of way network. The Disability Discrimination Act made taking 'reasonable steps' to improve access mandatory.

Governments have long faced rising pressure on this front, and rightly so – the charity Disabled Ramblers (<https://disabledramblers.co.uk/>) has played a key role here, pushing for better accessibility, waymarking, accessible travel to rights of way and the like. These calls are only likely to get louder in the years to come, and central government will need an ever-more visible strategy to deal with those changing and rising expectations.

So far, these efforts have been fragmented and piecemeal, under a raft of different types of legislation and handed over to all sorts of public and semi-public authorities. The Countryside and Rights of Way Act did stipulate that rights of way had to take the needs of disabled people into account, but in reality truly wide access is still very limited. Work around accessibility has tended to focus on physical adjustments and mobility-related impairments, not a really holistic view, taking into account everybody who wants to access rights of way.

Again, as with the making of the definitive map overall, what we might need here is a really detailed sense of the gap between promise and delivery, legislation and reality literally 'on the ground', theoretical responsibility and control. New technology may once more have a role to play here. The Disabled Ramblers have recently used a 360-degree camera to record routes on the Ridgeway Trail (<https://buckinghamshire.moderngov.co.uk/documents/s64347/DR%20Ridgeway%20Project.pdf>), and uploaded those images to Google Street View.

What, then, could government policy itself do better to ensure a truly inclusive amount of access? Really listening to the lived experiences of disabled people and their positive hopes for change, rather than the more negative removal of 'barriers' to access, will be one place to start.

In truth, what we need is a whole range of different types of rights of way to cater for all levels of abilities and diverse accessibility needs, without losing the rough and ready sense of 'real' access to outdoor spaces that more rugged paths, bridleways and byways can afford, and that many disabled people and their non-disabled peers enjoy. A dawning sense of how our individual and group needs and wants intersect with each other, rather than fitting people into boxes labelled 'disabled', should more than help here.

Clearer guidelines on levels of access, and how to maintain a range of rights of way for different types of user, will be essential, complicating but enriching the practice of pathmaking and remaking. There has been marked progress on this front (<https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/00225266231174766>) since the 1990s. Some local authorities still pay lip-service to access, while simply changing signs, providing a disabled toilet or a reserved bay in a carpark, and feel their mandate met. That is not going to be good enough for the 2020s and 2030s.

Paths as work

If rights of way really are to become more important in a public strategy fighting ill health, and if they are to allow greater access to all types of outdoors, then they will need to be maintained – and unfortunately this is in an environment of extreme public sector parsimony. Their physical creation and maintenance (<https://static1.squarespace.com/static/617aa9517441095f0e9c7812/t/66e9a40186d39b12f4f854ae/1726587911601/Working+on+paths.pdf>) is as important as their legal legitimacy: if they cannot be actually seen and traversed, then they may as well not exist in the first place. It is of course local authorities' responsibility to do this, and just as the definitive map proved hard to make, so the network is still expensive and time-consuming to maintain.

Some early signs on this front are slightly optimistic, with the new Labour Chancellor Rachel Reeves' first Budget making some moves towards propping up local government (<https://www.local.gov.uk/parliament/briefings-and-responses/autumn-budget-2024-lga-briefing#:~:text=Adult%20social%20care-,The%20Chancellor%20announced%20that%3A,funding%20to%20support%20social%20care.>) and providing (for instance) additional numbers of planners. But, in truth, local government funding has declined so much in recent years that recovery can only be extremely partial and very gradual.

Here voluntary groups of all types could be drawn into the policy mix, not just because they might provide cheap and willing allies for cash-starved local councils, but because they are genuinely enthusiastic about the rights of way network. They know huge amounts about it, and they are able to react quickly to local changes – either in the physical landscape, or in access demands and use. The overlap with policy for disabled rights of way users is obvious when groups such as Disabled Ramblers are so active and vocal.

This would hardly be a new departure - such groups have always been critical in the upkeep of all sorts of off-road tracks. The Open Spaces Society will always offer expert advice (<https://www.oss.org.uk/what-do-we-fight-for/footpaths-rights-of-way/>) when needed. The Ramblers' recent Don't Lose Your Way campaign (<https://www.ramblers.org.uk/support-us/dont-lose-your-way>) uncovered nearly 50,000 miles of rights of way that had fallen into disuse or disrepair. In 2018, the British Horse Society started to provide funds to people either wanting or challenging changes to the definitive map.

Going further back, the Peak and Northern Footpaths Society (<https://www.peakandnorthern.org.uk/>) has been opening and re-opening paths since the 1890s, and often clearing obstructions and fighting for better access, too. More locally, and since its foundation during the 'amenity boom' of the 1960s (when the future looked a lot more leisured than it in fact proved), the Monday Group has proved an effective provider or advocacy and labour for paths in Sussex.

Just as the drawing up of the definitive map did not and could not come free of charge, so the discovery or recovery of unused or blocked-up rights of ways involves a huge amount of work. Volunteers can and must be drawn into this work – not to save money, but to preserve rights of way themselves, as well as a sense of shared social endeavour and cohesion. Historians' role could be to recognise the past contributions, expertise and experience of these voluntary groups, all the better to integrate them into policy now.

The Coalition and Conservative government's 'Big Society' programme demonstrated the hazards (<https://localtrust.org.uk/news-and-stories/blog/why-did-the-big-society-fail/>) of this kind of approach. It was launched from the centre, it was a 'big bang' project associated with a political leadership not everyone trusted and who soon lost interest in the idea; and as such, it failed to mobilise civil society or private businesses behind it. Much more finely-grained work that comes from the grassroots *upwards*, rather than being projected supposedly *downwards* onto our rights of way, is required.

Apparently tiny amounts of seedcorn money, and action-research, working with small groups, will likely be more useful than politicians making a big noise that then dissipates. A clearer sense of the unpaid work public bodies might like to support, and surveys of what is out there to help build bridges and inform everyone involved, will also help. In the 1970s, another era of national doubt and constrained budgets, Prime Minister Harold Wilson asked his Ministers to think about changing 'little things that mean a lot' (http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk_politics/4552424.stm). Rights of way may seem 'little' in the grand scheme of things, but they seem to 'mean a lot' to volunteers who give up their time to look after them. They should be better supported.

Conclusion

There are few if any hard-and-fast 'lessons of history', and all we can offer here are sidelights and suggestions. But if Labour are to make new access policies that are clear, seen as fair, popular, enforceable and durable, the story of the 1949, 1968 and 2000 Acts are instructive.

Ministers and officials might consider, first of all, that it might take a long while – indeed many years – to get anywhere near their objectives, though of course the best time to start is today. And the use of new technology, while definitely helpful and necessary, will not solve all their problems. Understanding and (re-)thinking [what?] are critical intellectual work that cannot be short-circuited by satellite positioning and newly accessible online maps.

Then again, Labour will have to tell a *story* of why access to the land is so important, far beyond instrumental or even judgemental narratives of 'increasing obesity' (<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/cgk7l30egjeo>) or 'inactivity'. Positive views of what it is to be a citizen, a participant in meaningful society alongside others, are likely to be more powerful than negative views of inactivity.

This brings us to our third point: the importance of intimate local and regional meanings and use in the making and maintenance of paths and access areas. Sport, fun, 'fresh air', dog-walking (<https://www.nature.com/articles/s41598-019-41254-6>), getting to the shops or the pub, feeling a part of something: this is the sort of language that might succeed.

This should be combined with a deeply inclusive and positive view of access for all, not just walkers who can climb over stiles and go tramping over hills. Our fourth conclusion would be that such a wide sense of 'participation' would entrench policy all the more, creating believers and defenders who will ensure its success and future.

Our fifth and last recommendation would be a consistent, committed and ongoing engagement with voluntary groups of all types and at all levels – something the British state has not always been very good at, but should learn if it really wants to succeed.

Guidelines for better access policy might therefore be: patience; story-telling; a sense of the local; an emphasis on positive rather than negative rights; the mobilisation of civic society and of individuals. The past 75 years have seen those principles only fitfully applied, but at least its successes and failures can now be seen in a long-range and hopefully revealing perspective.

Further Reading

The *All Our Footsteps* Project Booklets (<https://www.allourfootsteps.uk/newwriting/the-all-footsteps-project-booklets>) - on 'Mapping Rights of Way', 'Healthy Ways', 'Citizenship', 'Accessible Ways', 'Citizenship' and 'Working on Paths' (2024).

Breen, T., Flint, A., Hickman, C. and O'Hara, G. 'Whose Right to Roam? Contesting Access to England's Countryside', *The Journal of Transport History* 44, 2 (2023), pp. 276-307.

Bryant, C., Burns, A. and Readman, P. (eds.), *Walking Histories, 1800-1914* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2016).

Cornish, J. *The Lost Paths: A History of How We Walk from Here to There* (London: Penguin, 2024).

Hewitt, R. *Map of a Nation: A Biography of the Ordnance Survey* (London: Granta, 2010).

Hickman, C. and O'Hara, G. 'Delineating the Landscape: Planning, Mapping and the Historic Imaginings of Rights of Way in Twentieth Century England and Wales', in Svensson, D., Saltzman, K. and Sverker, S. (eds.), *Pathways: Exploring the Routes of a Movement Heritage* (Winwick: White Horse Press, 2022), pp. 56-73.

Hodson, Y. 'Ordnance Survey and the Definitive Map of Public Rights of Way of England and Wales', *The Cartographic Journal* 39, 2 (2002), pp. 101-24.

Macfarlane, R. *The Old Ways: A Journey on Foot* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 2012).

Readman, P. *Storied Ground: Landscape and the Shaping of English National Identity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018).

Shoard, M. *This Land is Our Land* (London: Paladin, 1987).

Shrubsole, G. *The Lie of the Land: Who Really Cares for the Countryside?* (London: William Collins, 2024).

About the author

Glen O'Hara is Professor of Modern and Contemporary History at Oxford Brookes University. He is the author of a number of books, most recently *The Politics of Water in Post-War Britain* (Basingstoke, 2017). He is currently finishing a history of the domestic policies of the Blair Labour government of 1997-2007, and is the Principal Investigator of the AHRC-funded project 'In All Our Footsteps: Tracking, Mapping and Experiencing Rights of Way in Post-War Britain'.

SUBSCRIBE TO OUR NEWSLETTER!

Sign up to receive announcements on events, the latest research and more!

Email Address

To complete the subscription process, please click the link in the email we just sent you.

We will never send spam and you can unsubscribe any time.

About Us

H&P is based at the Institute of Historical Research, Senate House, University of London.

We are the only project in the UK providing access to an international network of more than 500 historians with a broad range of expertise. H&P offers a range of resources for historians, policy makers and journalists.

Read More (<https://www.historyandpolicy.org/index.php/about-us/what-we-do>)

SUBSCRIBE TO OUR NEWSLETTER!

Sign up to receive announcements on events, the latest research and more!

Email Address

To complete the subscription process, please click the link in the email we just sent you.

We will never send spam and you can unsubscribe any time.

About Us

What We do (<https://www.historyandpolicy.org/index.php/about-us/what-we-do>)

Who We Are (<https://www.historyandpolicy.org/index.php/who-we-are>)

Partners (<https://www.historyandpolicy.org/index.php/about-us/partners>)

International Network (<https://www.historyandpolicy.org/index.php/international-network>)

Contact Us (<https://www.historyandpolicy.org/index.php/about-us/contact-us>)

Publications

Policy Papers (<https://www.historyandpolicy.org/index.php/policy-papers>)

Opinion Articles (<https://www.historyandpolicy.org/index.php/opinion-articles>)

Dialogues (<https://www.historyandpolicy.org/index.php/dialogues>)

Historians' Books (<https://www.historyandpolicy.org/index.php/historians-books>)

History of Government Blog (<https://www.historyandpolicy.org/index.php/guest-historian-series>)

Editorial Guidelines (<https://www.historyandpolicy.org/index.php/editorial-guidelines>)

Policy Engagement

Seminars (<https://www.historyandpolicy.org/index.php/seminars>)

Workshops (<https://www.historyandpolicy.org/index.php/workshops>)

Training (<https://www.historyandpolicy.org/index.php/training>)

Case Studies (<https://www.historyandpolicy.org/index.php/case-studies>)

Consultations (<https://www.historyandpolicy.org/index.php/consultations>)

Projects (<https://www.historyandpolicy.org/index.php/projects>)

Global Economics and History Forum (<https://www.historyandpolicy.org/index.php/global-economics-and-history-forum>)

Trade Union and Employment Forum (<https://www.historyandpolicy.org/index.php/trade-union-forum>)

Parenting Forum (<https://www.historyandpolicy.org/index.php/parenting-forum>)

News & Events

News (<https://www.historyandpolicy.org/index.php/news>)

Events (<https://www.historyandpolicy.org/index.php/events>)

Follow Us

Keep up-to-date via our social networks

Follow on Twitter (<https://twitter.com/HistoryPolicy>) Like Us on FaceBook (<https://www.facebook.com/pages/History-Policy/118633308168125>)

Watch Us on Youtube (https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCPZ7eiX0-xlET3zet8G_xsA) Listen to us on SoundCloud (<https://soundcloud.com/history-policy>)

See us on flickr (<https://www.flickr.com/photos/132118442@N02>) Listen to us on Apple iTunes (<https://itunes.apple.com/gb/podcast/history-policy/id1008685226>)

© Copyright 2002-2024 History & Policy. All rights reserved.

[Privacy Policy](#) [Terms of Use](#) [Site Map](#)