



# National Trails Annual Report 2021/22

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NATIONAL TRAILS



NATURAL  
ENGLAND

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# 1 Summary

**"My wife and I have just completed the Yorkshire Wolds Way trail and were blown away by the stunning landscape in this relatively unknown area. The signing and gates were excellent."**<sup>1</sup>

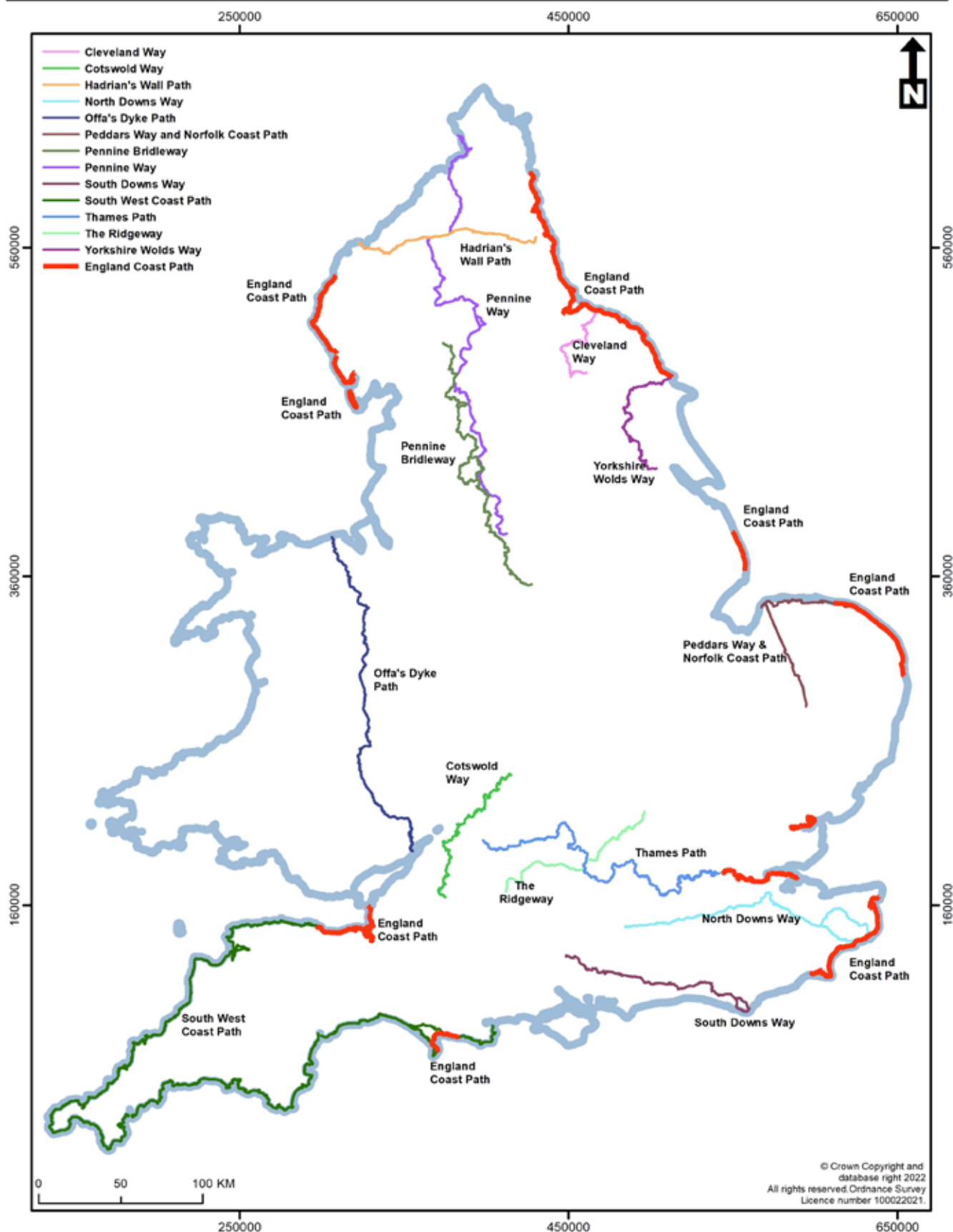
Management of National Trails started to get back to normal in 2021/22 following the COVID-19 pandemic. Some trail partnerships resumed face-to-face meetings and volunteers returned, although not to pre-pandemic numbers.

- The overall condition of National Trails remained comparable to previous years.
- In 2021/22 **Offa's Dyke Path** celebrated 50 years as a National Trail and the **Cotswold Way** held celebrations of 50 years as a long distance path (delayed from 2020/21).
- Use levels remained high on the trails, with some people counter data showing record visitor levels. This increase was in both day walkers and long-distance users.
- Volunteers remain vital to maintaining the condition of the trails. Despite volunteer numbers not yet returning to pre-pandemic levels, many hundreds of hours were spent clearing vegetation, repairing surfaces and gates, waymarking and surveying sections. Volunteers also helped with tasks such as social media promotion and community engagement.
- Many trails successfully used Natural England annual maintenance funding to secure additional funding. £3.58 million was spent on National Trails as a result of Natural England's annual maintenance grant of £1.7 million. Additional Natural England funding was used by some trails to deliver significant improvements that would otherwise not have happened.
- Development of the **England Coast Path** raised new management challenges associated with the weather, protected habitats and tidal litter. In contrast it also brought positive changes to coastal sections of some of the existing National Trails by providing the resources to realign the trails onto better routes.
- The number of exceptional events reported in 2021/22 was comparable with 2020/21. The majority of issues that did occur were quickly resolved. Ash die-back continued to be a safety issue for some trails.
- The trails continued to make changes to improve accessibility. Stiles and other barriers were removed. Path surfaces were improved to provide access for people using mobility scooters and, on the **South West Coast Path**, training for volunteers was provided to help them understand the needs of people with impaired mobility.
- Many trails worked in partnership to improve the quality of the habitats alongside their trails. Several trails adopted new wider cutting regimes to improve the biodiversity of trail verges.
- In 2021 Defra asked Natural England to prepare a report proposing Wainwright's Coast to Coast Path as a National Trail. In addition to the core work to improve the existing route and bring it up to National Trail Quality Standards, a parallel piece of work was started to establish how the benefits of being a National Trail could best be delivered. These include improving access for all users, spreading the economic benefits and community engagement.

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<sup>1</sup> Chris Huckle via Instagram





## 2 What are National Trails?

**"I'd like to thank all at National Trails for the amazing work they do and am lucky to have met so many lovely walkers over the years."**<sup>2</sup>

National Trails are outstanding long-distance routes that provide access to our finest landscapes. They are managed to an agreed set of Quality Standards and are waymarked with the distinctive acorn symbol. There are 13 existing National Trails in England, including **Offa's Dyke Path** which is partially in England and partially in Wales. This report also includes open sections of the **England Coast Path** National Trail.

Three new sections of the **England Coast Path** were opened in this period, increasing the length by a further 86 miles.

The newly opened sections were:

- **Maldon to Salcott** – opened 30 June 2021. Following the northern side of the Blackwater estuary, the largest estuary in Essex, this 27 mile section includes Osea island which can be reached by a mile-long tidal causeway.
- **Grain to Woolwich** – opened 12 January 2022. The 47 mile stretch from the Woolwich Foot Tunnel to Grain connects the Thames Path to the England Coast Path, creating a source-to-sea National Trail.
- **Silecroft to Silverdale** – partially opened 9 February 2022. The 12 miles between Silecroft beach car park and Green Road Railway Station form part of the Silecroft to Silverdale section and create a coastal trail available at all states of the tide.



Photo 1 - Grassland management regimes on Hadrian's Wall Path. Photographer Gary Pickles.

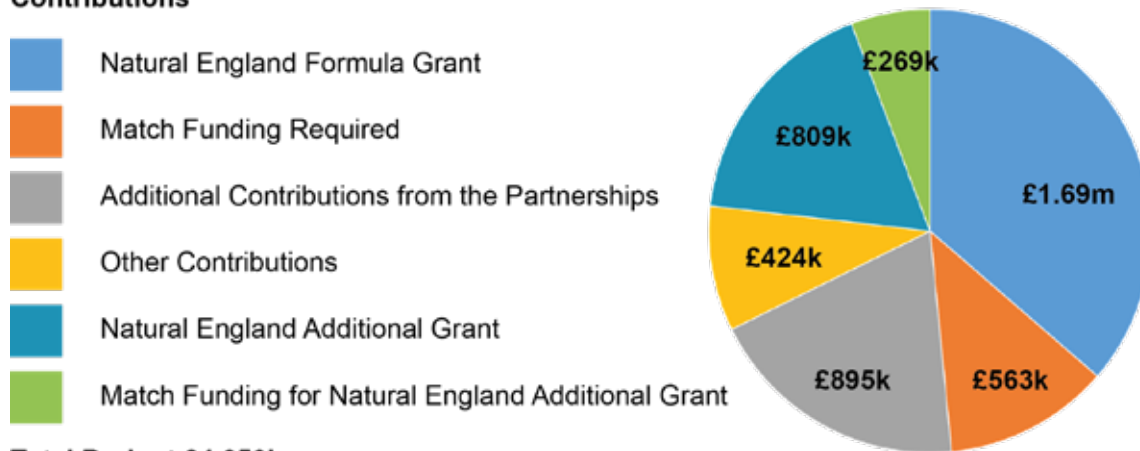
<sup>2</sup> Email sent to **Cotswold Way** Manager by an accommodation owner

### 3 Funding for National Trails

“On our pre-race recces and during the race, it was very noticeable that a lot of recent work has gone into signing the Pennine Bridleway trail. The new fingerposts made route finding very straightforward, thank you.”<sup>3</sup>

National Trails receive grant funding from Natural England. The allocation of funding follows a nationally-agreed formula. The amount provided (matched at a minimum rate of 3:1 by the local authority and local partnership contributions) helps sustain the trails in good condition and provides the basis for all additional development works. The existing family of National Trails and some new stretches of the **England Coast Path** use part of this funding to employ a lead officer who is instrumental in securing additional funding with support from the trail partnerships.

#### Contributions



#### Total Budget £4,650k

Figures rounded to the nearest thousand

Figure 1 - Breakdown of National Trail funding

- For the annual maintenance funding the required match funding of £563,000 was exceeded by just under £900,000, with an additional £424,000 also raised from other sources as a result of Natural England's investment in maintenance.
- An additional £269,000 was used to match the additional £809,000 Natural England support.
- In total £3.58 million was spent on National Trails as a result of just under £1.7 million grant.

Due to Natural England savings in other areas and the impact of COVID-19 on some areas of Natural England's work, it was possible to offer some additional funding to the National Trails in 2021/22. This was in recognition of the pressure trails were under due to the increase in use driven by the COVID-19 pandemic. Several trails specifically reported how beneficial this additional funding was to them, including the **Cleveland Way, Cotswold Way, Peddars Way and Norfolk Coast Path, South Downs Way** and **South West Coast Path**.

The **South Downs Way** used the additional funding to start a major trail improvement project. Funds were matched with South Downs Community Infrastructure Levy funding. A full feasibility study, project plans and site clearance were completed to create a new route for cyclists and equestrians between Chilcomb and Winchester. The new route will take trail users away from the

<sup>3</sup> Email received by trail manager from race organiser



busy A31, improving users' experience and safety.

Additional funding was used to deliver several projects on the **Peddars Way and Norfolk Coast Path**, including widening and surfacing the path at Brancaster.

Many trails successfully used Natural England annual maintenance funding to lever in additional grants and donations including:

- The **North Downs Way** used Natural England annual maintenance funding to match Interreg funding for the EXPERIENCE and Green Pilgrimage projects.
- The Peak and Northern Footpath Society donated £1,100 for a bridge on the **Pennine Way**.
- Proffitts (a Community Interest Company) provided a grant of £18,000 for surface improvements on the **Pennine Bridleway** in Lancashire.
- The **Pennine Bridleway** also secured £11,500 of Public Health Initiative money for trail improvements in Rossendale and £11,500 from North Yorkshire County Council towards works on sections of the trail following UURs (unsealed, unclassified roads).
- The British Horse Society made a number of £500 grants to support improvements on the **Pennine Bridleway** in the Yorkshire Dales, including the complicated repair of historic Hell Gill Bridge. They also contributed to drainage and surfacing improvements.



Photo 2 - Monumenta Romana, part of the Via Francigena Arts Trail on the North Downs Way. Photographer Alex Hare.



Photo 3 - Works underway on Hell Gill Bridge on the Pennine Bridleway. Photographer Peter Lambert.



Photo 4 - One of 2 new stone cross drains to deflect water away from the Pennine Bridleway. Photographer Peter Lambert.

Several trails have on-going partnerships that provided financial support, including:

- The South West Coast Path Association continued to support the **South West Coast Path** with contributions to projects including £8,000 towards the costs of path surface improvements in South Devon. It also ran a number of campaigns aimed at raising funds from the public. These included the Step Up appeal to raise funds for step improvements, the Find Your Way appeal for signage and a storm damage appeal.
- The Cotswold Way Association provided £2,000 which funded a variety of projects including resurfacing and bench installation/repairs. They also drew in a £7,500 donation from HF Holidays that funded further work to provide mobility scooter access at Leckhampton Hill.
- The **Pennine Way** signed a new agreement with Kirkby Lonsdale Brewery for the use of the **Pennine Way** name and National Trails acorn on their Pennine Ambler Ale in return for ten pence from every bottle sold.
- The Virtual Spine race raised funds to repair a section of the **Pennine Way** on Cross Fell.
- A shop at the end of the **Cotswold Way** raised £1,000 for the trail through the sale of 50 limited edition chopping boards.
- **The Ridgeway** raised funds through event donations and used these to fund replacement signage and a new illustrated map of **The Ridgeway**.
- **Hadrian's Wall Path** raised over £22,000 through the sale of **Hadrian's Wall Path** Passports, merchandise and donations.

## 4 Looking after National Trails

“What a pleasure to walk such a well maintained path with such clear waymarking in intelligent places.”<sup>4</sup>

Despite the challenges of managing National Trails through the pandemic the trail partnerships maintained the quality of the trails. One measure of the effectiveness of Natural England's support is the percentage of out of condition items, this measure remained comparable with previous years.

| Item                                | Total number | Number out of condition | % out of condition 2021/22 | % out of condition 2020/21 |
|-------------------------------------|--------------|-------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|
| Stiles                              | 747          | 86                      | 11.5%                      | 10%                        |
| Gates                               | 4,009        | 331                     | 8%                         | 9%                         |
| Bridges                             | 997          | 89                      | 9%                         | 9%                         |
| Fingerposts                         | 7,861        | 1287                    | 16%                        | 8%                         |
| Steps (flights of 10 or more steps) | 1,784        | 248                     | 14%                        | 16%                        |

Figure 2 – Out of condition items on all National Trails

<sup>4</sup> Facebook comment on the **Cotswold Way** Facebook page



As the COVID-19 pandemic restrictions eased and people started to get out again, many of the trails reported an increase in use. Several trails reported very high usage at some of their people counter locations:

- **Cleveland Way** people counters showed record numbers of people using the trail. The Hambleton counter, which primarily records long distance users, recorded the highest ever figure.
- On the **Pennine Way** user numbers were the highest ever recorded at Pen y Ghent and Snake Pass, and the number of users recorded in just five and a half months at High Force was higher than the annual totals recorded between 2012-14 and 2019-20.
- The **Yorkshire Wolds Way** reported figures well above normal levels of use and long-distance use levels up 50% from 2016.
- Data counters on the **Norfolk Coast Path** showed exceptionally high levels of use.
- Heavy use of the **Cotswold Way** over the COVID-19 period resulted in deteriorating surface conditions. A popular section of the trail at Wotton Hill, at risk of collapse due to erosion, was repaired in 2021/22 due to the additional Natural England funding. Steps at Coopers Hill were also repaired using this funding.

As more sections of the **England Coast Path** opened the managing authorities rose to the challenges of managing a National Trail through tidal areas with high density populations and high levels of human activity. For example, on the day of commencement the Woolwich to Grain and **Thames Path** extension was subject to diversions in four locations to accommodate development, an ongoing enforcement matter and the collapse of a culvert.

Coastal conditions contributed to management costs in places:

- On the **England Coast Path** in Kent wind damage resulted in frequent damage and loss of signage between Camber and Ramsgate. New, redesigned signs have been installed and are proving to be more resilient.
- The **England Coast Path** – Skegness to Mablethorpe section is accessible for people using mobility scooters and wheelchairs, however regular sand removal, especially after periods of windy weather, was necessary to keep the trail open to all users.

On other trails the development of the **England Coast Path** provided existing National Trails with opportunities for improvements. For example:

- Development of the South Downs section of the **England Coast Path** involved changing the line of the walking route of the **South Downs Way** between Eastbourne and Beachy Head and around Birling Gap, bringing the trail closer to the sea.
- The South Downs National Park Authority took ownership of Seven Sisters Country Park, through which both the **South Downs Way** and **England Coast Path** pass. £1.5million of investment improved visitor facilities, including a revamped visitor centre, new toilets and a new 'grab and go' refreshment kiosk, which were of great benefit to **South Downs Way** users.

Day to day management of the National Trails continued to ensure National Trails are managed in accordance with the Quality Standards. Examples of projects in 2021/22 include:

- Installation of new signs on **The Ridgeway** showing which users can make use of sections

of the trail. These were developed to address incidents of vehicle damage caused by users unaware of where they can go.

- On the **Cleveland Way** some of the more significant jobs related to coastal slips from the previous year. These included construction of two flights of timber steps on the slip site of the old railway line at Sandsend.
- 45 signs were upgraded, replaced or repaired on **Peddars Way and Norfolk Coast Path**.
- A new surface was laid on a heavily used but often flooded section of the **Thames Path** between Benson and Wallingford. This new surface should be more resilient than the previous construction.
- A section of the **Pennine Way** that also forms part of the Three Peaks route was repaired using 300 tonnes of surfacing material that was flown in. This repair will encourage people to keep to the path and reduce erosion.



Photo 5 & 6 - Re-surfacing works on Harberscar Lane on the Pennine Way in the Yorkshire Dales. Photographer Benji Grundy

- Despite proactive maintenance work on the **Pennine Way** including clearance of 1,286 cross drains and 1.5km of side drains, survey data showed that the condition of the trail has deteriorated year-on-year. There were 68% more issues requiring attention in 2021/22 than in 2016/17. A number of factors contributed to this including differences in recording and the unique challenges of managing an upland National Trail. However, the trail partnership has already identified a number of actions that will be implemented in 2022/23 to address the situation.
- In comparison, despite use levels increasing, the condition of the **Pennine Bridleway** is improving year-on-year, with 46% fewer issues in 2021/22 than five years ago.
- The iconic white timber bridge spanning the River Cuckmere at Alfriston on the **South Downs Way** was refurbished four years ago. In 2021/22 major improvements were carried out to the approach ramps allowing the path to be doubled in width and an additional waiting/ passing area to be created. New handrails were installed, a new surface laid and new horse mounting blocks and signage installed.

## 5 Exceptional events

**“Stunning path along the Thames, it’s a great walk especially from Sonning Eye to Henley. Passing locks, pubs and just wonderful scenery. Really popular on a sunny day.”<sup>5</sup>**

Despite a number of significant storms including Storm Arwen, the number of exceptional events reported was comparable to 2020/21.

- The **South West Coast Path** reported a number of coastal retreat incidents, one river bank collapse and two major storms causing windblown tree damage. Most issues, including two miles of trail closed due to windblown trees, were resolved in 2021/22, but storm damage to a 250m section of path near Carnsew Pool has yet to be repaired. This has been delayed due to legal issues and the sensitivity of the site.
- The **England Coast Path** - Tyne to Tees section reported three exceptional events requiring the trail to be moved inland.
- Two coastal retreat incidents on the **Cleveland Way** meant that the trail had to roll back inland by two metres for a total of 35 metres in length.
- Ash die-back continued to be an issue on the **Cotswold Way** where a number of temporary closures and diversions were needed to allow for removal of diseased trees.
- The **North Downs Way** received 28 reports of fallen trees, which constituted over 50% of issues reported in Kent.
- Storm Arwen affected woodland stretches of **Hadrian’s Wall Path** requiring three sections to be closed for four to six months.



Photo 7 - Storm Arwen devastation and diversions on Hadrian's Wall Path. Photographer Gary Pickles.

- In contrast, the **Thames Path** experienced a flood-free winter, which resulted in the trail remaining in good condition throughout the year.

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<sup>5</sup> Trip Advisor review of the Thames Path.



## 6 Accessibility

"I had a call yesterday from a very tearful member of the public. They had been to the top of Skelding Hill for the very first time in over 15 years as a result of the works you have completed on the footpath. I just wanted to thank the team that had done the work."<sup>6</sup>

The trails continued to work to improve access for all. In addition to the majority of open sections of the **England Coast Path**, the trails with no stiles are the **Cleveland Way**, **Pennine Bridleway**, **Thames Path**, **The Ridgeway** and **Yorkshire Wolds Way**. Only one stile remains on the **Peddars Way** and **Norfolk Coast Path**.



Photo 8 & 9 - Before and after photos taken at Skelding Hill on the Peddars Way and Norfolk Coast Path. Credit Norfolk County Council.

- Surface improvements at Brancaster, Skelding Hill and Thornham on the **Peddars Way and Norfolk Coast Path** opened up significant stretches of trail to users who were unable to visit them before.



- Positive publicity surrounded the removal of the last wooden stile on the **Cleveland Way**.

- The **North Downs Way** continued to improve accessibility. Four stiles were removed in 2021/22. Funds from the Interreg funded "Inspiring Views" arts project for accessibility allowed the trail to make significant improvements.

Photo 10 - Replacement of the last wooden stile with a new bridlegate on the Cleveland Way. Photographer Andrew Carter.

<sup>6</sup> Message sent to the **Peddars Way and Norfolk Coast Path** manager from local councillor.

- Two stiles were removed on **Offa's Dyke Path**.
- Two stiles were removed from the **South West Coast Path**.
- Four stiles were replaced with gates on the **England Coast Path** - Maldon to Salcott section.
- One stile was removed on the **Pennine Way**.
- On **Hadrian's Wall Path** one stile was replaced with a wicket gate, four wicket gates were removed to leave a gap and seven kissing gates were replaced with wicket gates to improve accessibility.

- The **South West Coast Path** ran three Easy Access awareness training sessions to help volunteers understand the issues experienced by walkers with limited mobility. In addition, three Easy Access walks were updated on the South West Coast Path Association's website.

- On the **South West Coast Path** in West Cornwall the National Trust, in consultation with Cornwall Rolling Ramblers (disabled ramblers), completed works to improve a section of path surface and gateway to enable better access for people using mobility scooters, trampers and pushchairs.



Photo 11 - Easy Access Awareness Day for Path reps at Penrose estate in Cornwall on the South West Coast Path. Photographer South West Coast Path Association.

- The **England Coast Path** – Brean Down to Minehead team completed the re-creation of the **England Coast Path** Storywalks on Ordnance Survey's Secret Stories app. The app now includes 12 walks with audio narration allowing users to complete the walks without having to read from the screen. Eight of the twelve walks are suitable for wheels.



- A 600m section of the **England Coast Path** - Tyne to Tees at Noses Point was resurfaced to allow use by people with limited mobility.

- Two kissing gates were converted to pedestrian gates on the **Yorkshire Wolds Way**.

- On the **Yorkshire Wolds Way** high-tide route at North Ferriby easy-access gates were installed to replace old A-Frame motorbike barriers.

Photo 12 - England Coast Path at Noses Point. Photographer Durham County Council.



- A 1km section of the **Pennine Bridleway** through Healey Dell Nature Reserve that connects several housing estates was improved in 2021/22 to provide a route that everyone can enjoy.



Photo 13 & 14 - Pennine Bridleway at Wallbank before and after accessibility improvements. Photographer Bill Brady.

- A low-gradient ramp was installed to improve access from the Cinder Track on the **Cleveland Way** at Robin Hood's Bay.
- Further access improvements were made to the **Cotswold Way** at Leckhampton to create a route that can be enjoyed by people using disability scooters and pushchairs, and to encourage people to stay on the path and avoid damaging the SSSI grassland.

## 7 Partnerships

**"Today just got even better. Isobel from the England Coast Path @ecpsomerset has arrived with litter pickers for us. Not only that, she came armed with bags recycled from old tents from @2minbeachclean. Thank you we really appreciate your gift."**

The established National Trails are managed by trail partnerships made up of local authorities, trail staff and key local partners. The work of these partnerships is crucial to the successful management and future development of National Trails. Some of the trail partnerships went back to holding face-to-face meetings in 2021/22 after a period of video conferencing. Several, for example the **Pennine Trails** and **South Downs Way**, continued to hold some meetings on-line to reduce travel and associated carbon emissions.

Work is ongoing to establish trail partnerships for sections of the **England Coast Path**. Some sections will be covered by existing trail partnerships, in other places new partnerships are being

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<sup>7</sup> Amanda Loach on Twitter



developed. In addition to the trail partnerships, trail managers work in partnership with other local organisations. Examples from 2021/22 include:

- The **Yorkshire Wolds Way** worked in partnership with the East Riding Food and Tourism Network and Visit Hull and East Yorkshire. This allowed a programme of activities to be developed in preparation for the 40th Anniversary of the trail.
- The **North Downs Way** worked with Natural England, Defra and local partners in relation to the proposed 'White Cliffs Inland Border Facility (IBF)' located across the **North Downs Way** at Guston, Dover.
- The **Offa's Dyke Path** trail manager worked in partnership with the newly appointed Offa's Dyke Conservation Officer to deliver projects along the National Trail to improve the condition of Offa's Dyke monument.
- The **Yorkshire Wolds Way** developed a new partnership with Drifffield's Men in Sheds, a charity that works to combat poor mental health and loneliness. The group produce bespoke, large waymarkers for farmyards along the trail and have designed and made 40th Anniversary candle holders by recycling old **Yorkshire Wolds Way** signposts. Sales of these will benefit both trail maintenance and the charity.
- The **Thames Path** partnership worked with the Cotswold Water Park and adjacent water-skiing lake owner to reach an agreement whereby the lake owner will carry out improvement works part funded by the **Thames Path** to benefit the National Trail and visitors to their site.
- The **Pennine Bridleway** worked with Network Rail to repair significant damage caused by using the trail to access the railway air vent on the moor. Following negotiations, approximately 350m was surfaced and repaired.
- The **South West Coast Path** is a partner on the Connecting Actively to Nature programme run by Active Devon. Activities on the trail branded 'Couch to Coast' were run, designed to suit the ability of someone taking their first footsteps into increasing their activity and leading a healthier lifestyle.
- The presence of the **England Coast Path** – Skegness to Mablethorpe section motivated the local authority to redevelop an abandoned boatshed at Huttoft into a café and viewing deck.

## 8 Volunteering

**“Having now walked all of Hadrian’s Wall Path, I am very grateful to you, and all other volunteers, who give their time to maintain this wonderful National Trail. Thank you.”<sup>8</sup>**

Volunteers made a welcome return on many of the National Trails, although numbers were not back to pre-pandemic levels. On some trails volunteers are essential for regular maintenance, for example on **The Ridgeway** where volunteers cut back 22km of soft vegetation and 6km of scrub in 2021/22, and the **Thames Path** where they cut 41.5km of soft vegetation.

- **Hadrian’s Wall Path** recorded 193 volunteer days in 2021/22. The majority involved core monitoring and maintenance work, but 55 days were given to support guided walks including the North East Youth Walk, MIND mental health walk and a walk for refugees on the trail



- **North Downs Way** volunteer activity returned in 2021/22. An additional 40 North Downs Way Ambassadors were appointed. Volunteers contributed to practical work on the trail, supporting walking festivals and community events. 160 volunteers contributed 5,000 hours at an estimated value £60,000.

Photo 15 - North Downs Way Ambassador Training.  
Photographer Alex Hare.

- Volunteering was reinstated on the **Pennine Way**. 192 days were spent by volunteers maintaining the trail.
- 300 hours of volunteer time were spent on the **South Downs Way**.
- **The Ridgeway** volunteers spent 800 hours on the trail and made progress in addressing the backlog of work that had built up during the pandemic.
- The **England Coast Path** - Brean Down to Minehead condition survey was completed by volunteers in 2021/22 for the first time.
- Significant investment by the East Riding of Yorkshire Council in grass and scrub cutting equipment meant that volunteers on the **Yorkshire Wolds Way** had better access to equipment, increasing the vegetation clearance they were able to deliver.
- The Cotswold Voluntary Wardens gave 4,000 hours of their time to the **Cotswold Way** in 2021/22, patrolling 884 miles and spending 973 hours on waymarking and carrying out 400 small repairs.
- Over 300 volunteer days were spent on the **Cleveland Way**.
- The Pennine Way Champions (volunteers in the North Pennines AONB) continued to support the **Pennine Way** spending 80 days on tasks including improving a section of the Bowes Loop

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<sup>8</sup> Twitter message posted on the Hadrian’s Wall Path Twitter page.

in Baldersdale, drainage at Dufton and surfacing, stile and waymarking improvements. In the summer they carried out litter picking and managed visitor behaviour at honey-pot sites

- A number of volunteers signed up to be monitors for sections of the **Yorkshire Wolds Way** in North Yorkshire. They carried out inspections to monitor the condition of the route and maintenance including waymarking, gate adjustment, sign refurbishment, deck-board repairs and vegetation clearance. In total in 2021/22 they contributed 126 hours to monitoring and helped reduce the number of issues on the trail.
- Volunteers from The Ramblers spent 130 hours on the **Yorkshire Wolds Way** replacing waymarkers, fixing gates, cleaning benches and installing signs and waymarkers.



Photo 16 - Beverley Ramblers fitting a new bench at Bottom Plantation on the Yorkshire Wolds Way.  
Photographer Sam McGivern.



## 9 Protecting landscapes and biodiversity

“We couldn’t have chosen a better long distance path! The weather has been phenomenal and scenery stunning. I’ve also recorded some rare orchids and butterflies along the way - most notably the duke of burgundy on Prestbury Hill and chalkhill blue. Scarce birds included red kite, redstarts and crossbill. Waymarking was spot on and needed little help from OS maps so that was most appreciated.”<sup>9</sup>



Photo 17 - Grassland management regimes on Hadrian's Wall Path. Photographer Gary Pickles.

Most of the trails work in partnership with other organisations to help protect and enhance the landscapes surrounding the trail. Examples from 2021/22 include:

- One of the biggest projects ever undertaken on **Offa's Dyke Path** was completed in 2021/22. Repairs to the path over Ruabon Moor, costing £170,000, were undertaken to protect the blanket bog which is part of the Berwyn and South Clwyd Mountains Special Area of Conservation.
- The ESSO pipeline mitigation fund enabled the **South Downs Way** to restore over 800m of native hedging along the trail near Winchester.
- Vegetation cutting for wildflower management took place at several locations on the **Cleveland Way** including Sutton Bank, Oakham Beck near Robin Hood's Bay and at Upgang Ravine, Whitby.
- In partnership with the Earth Trust, **Thames Path** volunteers planted 170 trees at River of Life II in Oxfordshire as part of a wet woodland creation project alongside the **Thames Path** on Little

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<sup>9</sup> **Cotswold Way** Hall of Fame member

Wittenham Manor's land.

- The **South Downs Way** team continued to manage the Itford wildflower meadow to maintain the wide diversity of wild flowers adjacent to the trail.
- Corridor widening and cutting was carried out on the Hudson Way Rail Trail section of the **Yorkshire Wolds Way** to encourage a more diverse range of flora.
- Work was carried out on the **England Coast Path** – Allonby to Whitehaven section to cut back encroaching vegetation, to treat Japanese Knotweed and delineate the route. This work greatly improved the condition of the trail along three urban sections within Workington which had previously suffered from the effects of anti-social behaviour.
- The **England Coast Path** - Brean Down to Minehead section continued to support clean beaches. Additional #2minute beach clean boards were installed, one at Haven in Doniford and one at Hoburne in Blue Anchor. Haven reported that their owners and visitors were using the kits and they were planning an Owners Beach Clean event in the summer. Litter-pick kits were supplied to Otterhampton Primary School and the Huntspill Primary Academies.
- Walkers now have a choice of routes on the **Cleveland Way** near Osmotherley. The new route passes by the historic Lady Chapel taking walkers to a site previously regarded as being too far 'off the beaten track'. The change was very well received and was launched at a special event by the Bishop of Middlesbrough.
- Cutting regimes were altered on several sections of the **Pennine Bridleway** in Derbyshire and the Peak District to enhance the flora and fauna of verges on either side of the trail. These included the Sett Valley Trail, High Peak Trail and Haydale.



Photo 18 - Wildflowers along the High Peak Trail section of the Pennine Bridleway. Photographer Heather Procter.

- The Thames Valley Environmental Record Centre carried out an ecological survey of 44 miles of **The Ridgeway** from Streatley to Overton Hill. Over 330 different species were recorded including 307 species of plants, 134 protected and notable species and two invasive non-



native species. Areas of habitat were mapped, including 10.5ha of priority grassland, 33.2ha with restoration potential and 46km of hedgerow.

- **The Ridgeway** team trialled cut-and-collect management on four verge plots to lower fertility and encourage native wildflowers. The plots will be managed and monitored to assess the impact on the vegetation.

## 10 Promoting National Trails

**"This was our Honeymoon thru-hike on Offa's Dyke Path. Thank you for having such a beautiful National Trail."**<sup>10</sup>

This year saw the **Offa's Dyke Path** 50th anniversary celebrations. Many different events and activities took place including promotion and social media activity. A Facebook memories page was established for people to share their experiences of walking the trail over the past 50 years.

The 50th anniversary of the **Cotswold Way** was in May 2020 but the celebrations were postponed due to the COVID-19 pandemic and eventually took place in September 2021. The **Cotswold Way** was established as a National Trail in 2007 but it has existed as a promoted long distance walk since 1970. The celebrations attracted publicity in Cotswold Life and local media. Relay walks were led by Cotswold Wardens and Ramblers, with staff joining them from the Cotswold National Landscape, rights of way teams, the Cheltenham branch of John Lewis and Robert Welch Design studio who also designed and made the baton for the event.

Other promotional activity included:

- The northern trails – the **Cleveland Way, Yorkshire Wolds Way, Pennine Way** and **Pennine Bridleway** worked together to promote their circular walks on the Outdoor Active app, under a National Trails North brand.
- To celebrate the **Thames Path** 25th Anniversary a new page was added to the National Trail website called 'How the Trail became'.
- The comedian Bill Bailey helped raise the profile of **The Ridgeway** by being the 'face' of the trail to launch **The Ridgeway** Hall of Fame on International Trails Day in June.
- The **Thames Path** had an active social media presence including Twitter, Facebook and Instagram. It benefitted from a dedicated social media volunteer who, through regular posts, doubled the trail's social media following in a year.
- Harvey Maps published a new **Pennine Bridleway** map which generated good exposure



Photo 19 - Cover of the September 2021 edition of Country Walking magazine featuring Offa's Dyke Path.

<sup>10</sup> Offa's Dyke Path Facebook Memories page comment.



for the trail. The trail team used this to develop closer ties with marketing teams in partner organisations. These relationships will improve marketing of the trail going forwards.

- The **England Coast Path** - Brean Down to Minehead “Storywalks” generated press and local radio coverage. They featured on BBC Somerset and on West Somerset Community Radio and made it to The Telegraph’s ‘20 Fun things to do in Somerset’ in July.
- The Lonely Planet Award listed Kent’s Heritage Coast (the Folkestone to Dover section of the **North Downs Way**) as the fourth placed Top Global Destination for 2022. This was the first time a UK destination had been nominated in 15 years.
- **Offa’s Dyke Path**, along with the other Welsh National Trails, benefitted from professional social media support and doubled its Instagram following in 2021/22.
- The section of **England Coast Path** between New Romney and Dungeness in Kent featured in the BBC ‘Walking With’ series with comic Jim Moir (Vic Reeves) who highlighted the numerous points of interest in only a short section, everything from bees to sound mirrors.
- 14 Circular Walks were re-launched on the **England Coast Path** in Somerset. The new leaflets included maps and walking directions. A new Coastal Walks in Somerset leaflet was also produced – all with the **England Coast Path** identity.

## 11 Looking ahead

“Thank you for all your hard work. You do a fantastic job. The paths, steps etc are amazing.”<sup>11</sup>

The last two annual reports included detail about how the COVID-19 pandemic affected the ability for trail partnerships to get out and maintain the trails and the number of visitors who were able to enjoy the trails. Natural England’s [People and Nature Survey](#) (PANS) has also covered this period nationally. The trails – like many local greenspaces and access areas further afield – recorded high levels of use during the pandemic. Whilst these levels have certainly not been sustained, the people counters provided evidence of high levels of use, which suggests that some people may have continued to explore these high quality networks. However, now that trail partnerships have been able to get out and undertake more detailed survey work, some issues have been uncovered relating to changing condition that may actually have been building over the last couple of years, for example on the Pennine Way. The Pennine Trails Partnership is seeking to address these as a matter of priority and Natural England has continued to try to secure additional funding to support capital works where possible within budgetary constraints.

Whilst public sector funding remains challenging, Natural England has been delighted to secure an uplift for the National Trails for three years from April 2022 and hopes to be able to report on how this funding has supported the trails in the next annual report.

The Funding Formula (for allocating grant to National Trails and commenced stretches of England Coast Path) was reviewed during 2021/22 by trail partnerships for the second time since its introduction in 2013. It was endorsed as an evidence-based, transparent and equitable way of allocating funding but it was also felt that some of the collation of evidence regarding exceptional weather events could potentially be used to demonstrate the impact of climate change on the trails. Again, we hope to include more of this data in a future report.

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<sup>11</sup> Message sent to **Cleveland Way** manager.

National Trails UK (the name of the new company set up by the informal National Trails' Alliance) secured charitable status during 2021/22, has appointed trustees and is (at the time of writing) in the process of recruiting staff. We feel it would be appropriate and of interest to include an update on their situation in the next annual report.

The England Coast Path continues towards completion with three stretches (see section 2) either fully or partially commencing during this period. This was in spite of the delays to establishment works on the ground arising from the impact of the Covid 9 pandemic. The government announced in February 2022 that the England Coast Path will be fully walkable by the end of this Parliament – connecting communities from Northumberland to Cornwall.



Photo 20 - Surfacing at Leckhampton Hill on the Cotswold Way to allow greater access for mobility scooters. Photographer Harvey Mattinson.







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