

Springfield Farm, Horton, South Gloucestershire

Many members will know that the use of footpaths across Springfield Farm, Horton, South Gloucestershire has effectively been denied to walkers due to the aggressive attitude of the landowner. In recent weeks matters seem to have escalated with verbal abuse to one of our own Avon members and a physical assault, when confronted by three people, on a walker from the Melksham area. Below is the recent legal history regarding these footpaths.

An application was made by the landowner to South Gloucestershire Council for deletion of the paths from the Definitive Map. The Council commissioned a report from consultants who did a very thorough job. No doubt this report was instrumental in the Public Rights of Way and Commons Registration Committee resolving on the 13th December 2007:

1) that no order be made for for the modification of the Definitive Map and Statement by deletion of footpaths LHO 29, 31, and 34 and that section of LHO 30 from its junction with LHO 31 in a south south westerly direction to Mapleridge Lane.

3) to delete that length of LHO 30 from Vinney Lane in a south easterly direction fpr approximately 261 metres to its junction with LHO 30 at Grid Reference 7415 8548.

Having previously made my views known I was supportive of both of these decisions and presumed that this would put an end to years of aggravation. Having seen the strength of the consultants report I was amazed to learn that the landowners had decided to exercise their right to take the matter to appeal.

The Inspector's judgement upholding in full the Council's decision was made known on 27th March 2009. I have asked for a copy of the report to be posted on the Avon Area website.

It was now for the Council to make sure the paths are properly signposted. I understand that the Rights of Way Team are actively pursuing the matter but as at 22nd June 2009 have received little effective co-operation from the landowner and are seeking the help of the police. An unaccompanied visit by a Field Officer poses obvious dangers.

Members will have their own views on how assertive they wish to be in claiming their right to walk these paths. My own view is that it would be wise to give the Council a little longer to regularise the situation and avoid the unpleasantness of confrontation. Walks leaders especially may wish to take account of the current situation as the landowner seems to have taken against Ramblers in particular.

It is worth noting that the footpaths in question are those that go in and around the farm yard. In the short term you may find alternatives that suit your purposes.

Ron Phelps. South Gloucestershire Footpaths Secretary.