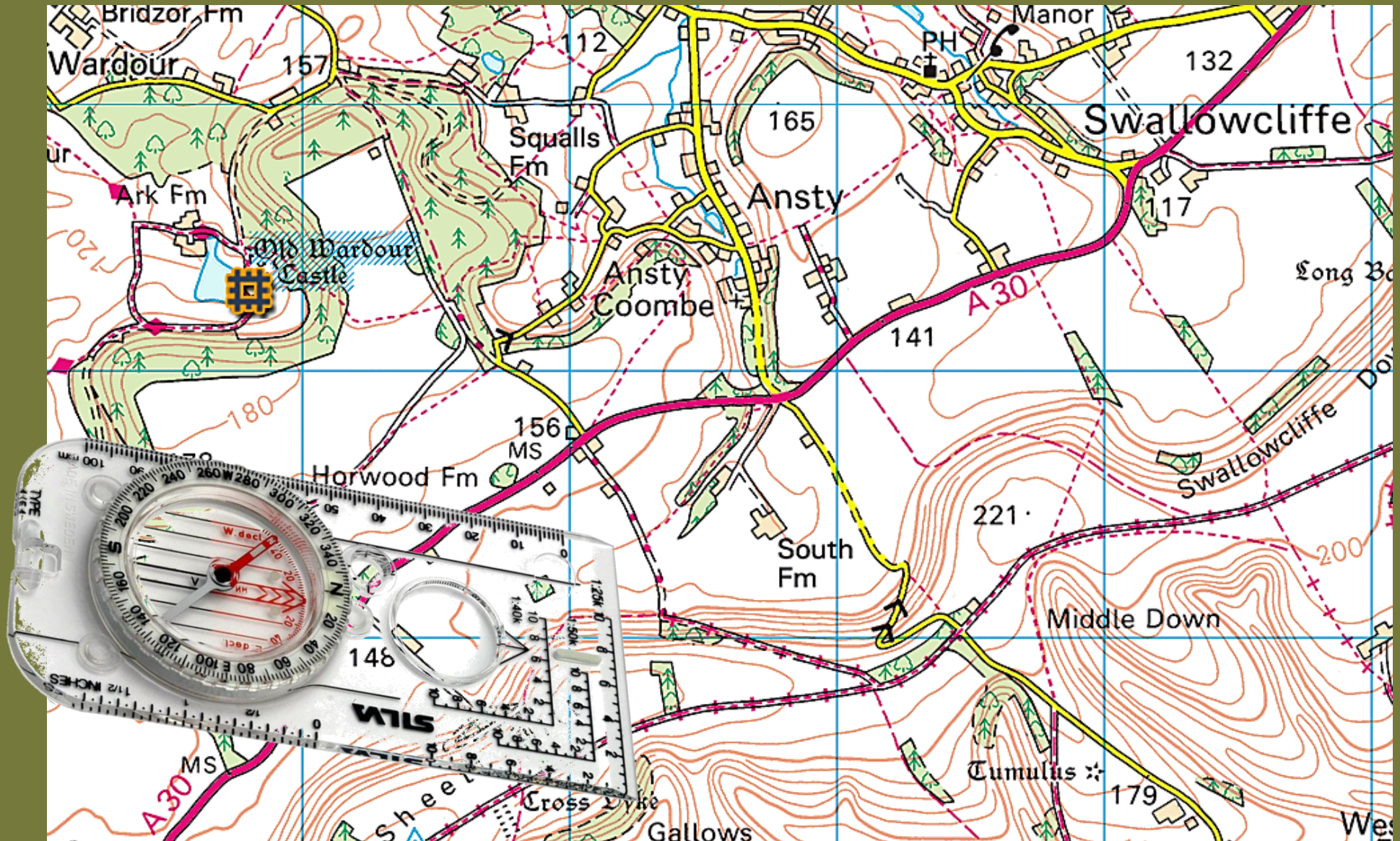


Goodbye to 'Lost Ways?'



Under The Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 (yes, nearly 20 years ago!) the Government set a deadline of 25 years for people to make a case for the preservation of 'lost' historic paths and bridleways that are not marked on official maps. After this deadline – these so called 'lost ways' will be extinguished forever.

There are 140,000 miles of footpaths, bridleways and byways criss-crossing England and Wales. In 2000 the Government estimated that a further 20,000 paths are unrecorded – a small but significant number because these 'lost ways' are snippets of trackways that often linked the better known routes that are recorded.

This task of identifying intriguing 'lost footpaths' and then submitting an application to local authorities has been largely left to enthusiastic volunteer members of the public. So far, 5,000 applications have been submitted.

It seems that most local authorities have deemed this procedure as 'low priority' because they either appear overwhelmed with the number of applications submitted or just ignore them all together. Very few applications across the country have been determined.

It also appears that we don't know too much about this opportunity anyway. Indeed a £15 million government

scheme 'Discovering Lost Ways' encouraging people to record old 'rights of way' that have been 'lost' was scrapped way back in 2008 because of the cost. So much for joined up thinking!

We are quite fortunate in Ansty (and indeed the surrounding area) to have retained a large number of local rights of way. However, even in our parish one can cast an historical eye over the landscape and surmise where old footpaths and bridleways were once but now no longer exist – that is, they have been 'lost'. Some historical paths were undoubtedly lost during land enclosures but most 'lost ways' disappeared between 1914 and the early post WW2 period when landowners endeavoured to consolidate their holdings.

Some people think that submitting applications to include a whole host of newly discovered 'lost ways' is a step too far.

Christopher Price (director of policy at the Country Land and Business Association (CLA), which represents landowners and rural businesses recently remarked: 'the focus should be ensuring public resources are spent on properly maintaining and looking after all recorded rights of way to ensure that the public can continue to enjoy them'.

He may well have a point.

Some facts about 'Rights of Way'

- England and Wales have 140,000 miles of public rights of way – including footpaths and bridleways – marked on maps
- Government estimates suggest that a further 10,000 miles of rights of way or 20,000 paths are unmarked. Campaigners argue this figure is much higher.
- Under English common law rights of way do not expire, but the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 required all rights of way to be recorded
- 22% of the existing rights of way network is accessible to horses
- Campaigners say that recording new routes will not expose them to quad bikes or 4 x 4 vehicles: only to cyclists, riders and walkers



A lone walker on Ansty Down above Ansty village, following a former bridle road to Berwick St John.