

ENGLAND'S COASTAL PATH: THE JOURNEY BEGINS

The new Marine and Coastal Access Act creates clear and consistent public rights along the English coast for most types of open-air recreation on foot. The Act places a duty on Natural England to use its powers to secure twin objectives for coastal access. The first is a long-distance route (or routes) around the English coast: and the second is access to a margin of land in association with the route where people will be able to spread out and explore, rest or picnic in appropriate places.

The Act also required Natural England to consult on and then to publish a coastal access Scheme**, describing how NE will align the route and the associated 'spreading room', and the ways in which access will be managed to minimise conflicts with other land uses. It is the blueprint that will be used on each leg of the journey, as an all-England coast path is developed stretch by stretch around the country. The Scheme was approved by the Secretary of State on 23rd March 2010.

Formal approval of the Scheme means that it is now possible to begin work on implementing the very first stages of the coastal path – planned on a stretch of coast near Weymouth, in order to have the new rights in place there in time for the 2012 Olympics. Implementation is then due to start next year (2011) in 5 other areas – Cumbria, East Riding, Kent, Norfolk and Somerset.

At the moment, up here we expect the first stretch of coast to be worked on to be from the Scottish Border to Whitehaven. We anticipate a structured programme of public information, with a variety of mechanisms supported by Natural England, Cumbria County Council, the Lake District National Park Authority (as work moves South of Whitehaven), and other interested parties, to prepare the County for practical implementation on the ground beginning in late 2011 or early 2012.

** a copy of the Scheme can be viewed at

<http://naturalengland.etraderstores.com/NaturalEnglandShop/NE269>