

Ramblers' trespass is one defiant step of access campaign

BY TOM KNIGHT

e-mail newsdesk@westgaz.co.uk

MORE than 20 determined ramblers have staged a mass trespass in a campaign to improve access from Poundbury to the surrounding countryside.

In July, the Western Gazette reported on Dave Green of the South Dorset Ramblers and his fight to open up direct walking routes along private rural tracks from Poundbury to Maiden Castle.

He suggested this would offer safer and more convenient access to the landmark from the estate. The plan would require opening up two underpasses under the busy A37 and A35 roads, which have been gated since their construction.

Two weeks ago, a group of fellow ramblers gathered to take a closer look at the A37 underpass in an effort to persuade landowners, tenants and councils to reconsider the question of public access to the countryside.

Ramblers group secretary Peter Evans, who attended the trespass, said: "Technically, trespass is no longer an offence for which you can be prosecuted, unless you cause damage. Clearly, we weren't causing damage."

He said he was pleased that good progress was being made to persuade the Duchy to open up the A37 pass and link it with old-established bridleways and a new footpath.

He said: "The Duchy has agreed to open it up for pedestrians, with a new footpath from Poundbury linking to an existing bridleway on the west side of the A37.

"Part of the bridleway, which has

been obstructed for many years, has recently been re-established by the Duchy and runs north from the underpass. They have also promised to re-establish the bridleway running south, currently still gated and locked, and to join it with a new footpath from Poundbury, running through the underpass, within the next two years."

He said negotiations to open up the A35 underpass and tracks were ongoing, and called on the Duchy to honour the Poundbury Development Brief, which laid out where public access would be granted.

He said: "The situation with the route from Poundbury to Maiden Castle under the A35 is more problematic. While the Duchy has agreed in principle to open up the underpass for pedestrians, thereby avoiding the dangers of crossing the busy A35, they are not currently intending to establish the footpaths to Maiden Castle as defined in the Poundbury Development Brief.

"The alternative being suggested by the Duchy would take walkers on a roundabout route, through the underpass then north west, passing close alongside the busy A35 traffic, and then following a field boundary westwards before joining an existing footpath which heads south towards Maiden Castle.

"All this rather than the more direct and pleasant route utilising an existing farm track. We hope that those involved can be persuaded to accept the route shown on the brief and to open this access route to Maiden Castle without any further delay."

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BREAKING BOUNDARIES: South Dorset Ramblers stage a mass trespass at an underpass beneath the A37, which they would like to see opened for better public access to Maiden Castle