

OXFORD FIELDPATHS SOCIETY

(Oxford and District Footpaths, Bridlepaths and Commons Preservation Society)

President J Ibbott

Honorary Officers and Executive Committee, 2007-2008

Chairman L Spiess

General Secretary D Godfrey

Minutes Secretary Dr. E Adams

Treasurer J A Eyre

Membership Secretary Mrs G Seiffert

Walks Organiser Mrs S Crisp

Publicity Mrs S Carmichael

Website J Lampert

District Secretaries

Cherwell D Godfrey

City of Oxford vacant

South Oxfordshire N Moon

Vale of White Horse J W Andrew

West Oxfordshire J Asbridge

Other Members
Mrs V Haskins
L Gammon
B Colley
Mrs H Burlingham
Mrs V Forsdyke

Scrutineer of Accounts Janet Isaac

Website address: "www ofs org uk"

Enquiries should be addressed as follows:

Details of the Society's work and

reports of obstructions	Appropriate District Secretary
Membership	Membership Secretary
Walks – specific dates	Leader named in programme

Renewal subscriptions (when not paid by Bankers' Order) should be sent to the Membership Secretary. Cheques should be made payable to "Oxford Fieldpaths Society". Taxpayers are asked to sign a Gift Aid declaration if they have not already done so.

Members wishing to assist the Committee by inspecting specific rights of way may offer their services by writing to the appropriate District Secretary. For information on public paths and general topographical detail, sheet 164 of the Ordnance Survey 1:50000 Landranger series is recommended (scale 2cm to 1km, roughly 1.25" to the mile). For fieldwork greater detail is shown on the 1:25000 Explorer series (scale 4cm to 1km, roughly 2.5" to the mile), available from many booksellers, stationers and outdoor clothing suppliers.

The Society is affiliated to:

- The Open Spaces Society
- The Ramblers' Association
- The Chiltern Society
- The Oxford Preservation Trust

1. CHAIRMAN'S INTRODUCTION

It was a cause for great joy to see so many smiles on the faces of the 34 members on the first walk of January. True, it was a glorious, cloudless day, but it followed a night of very heavy rain and the ground was saturated, with much standing water to be negotiated and boggy areas to be crossed. Similarly, to witness the great enjoyment shared by members at the barn dance last November gave one a very warm feeling on an otherwise chilly evening. It is always difficult to know if we are doing the right thing. We can debate issues until the cows come home but in the end it is our membership that decides and you show that by voting with your feet.

I hope that you will agree with me that 2007 has been another vintage year for the OFS. We have seen membership continue to rise and it is now close to 500; the walks programme grows ever larger, yet the number of people participating in each walk remains strong; the social and residential events continue to be so popular that, due to space limitations, those not quick off the mark may be disappointed.

Your District Secretaries have been busy with some 300 fieldpath problem report forms being submitted to the Oxford County Council; of these about a third have been resolved or part resolved whilst strong representations continue to be made on your behalf concerning diversions and obstructions throughout the county. The BMW case was too big for us to fight alone but we agreed to make a contribution to the Ramblers Association fighting fund, as it was very much on our patch. Unfortunately, the case was lost but we have agreed a donation of £5,000 toward their costs.

An indication that we take our responsibilities seriously has been the offering of a series of courses in First Aid and for Walks Leaders (the latter run by the RA) and it is hoped to include further courses in basic navigation and in the skills required to become an effective District Secretary.

All of these pursuits call upon the expertise and time of volunteers who work tirelessly, often for many years, on your behalf to provide the activities that you so obviously enjoy. We are very sorry to lose from our committee four long serving and very dedicated officers who retire this year, namely John Andrew, Brian Colley, Lew Gammon and Gretchen Seiffert. Happily, they will continue to work behind the scenes and regular events such as the London walk, skittles, barn dance, and annual outing, for example, will still be organised by them. The role of Membership Secretary is key, it is the first real contact with potential new members, and the keeping of meticulous records is vital and one which Gretchen has fulfilled in an exemplary way for the past five years. Happily, Gwyneth Tyson, who is already active in arranging a visit to Gradbach, has accepted our invitation to stand for election to the committee as Membership Secretary designate.

We were sorry to learn of the death of Derek Hallam during the year and it was gratifying to see so many of our longer serving members turn up at his funeral to pay their last respects. I know too, that Brian Colley has been very moved by the amount of sympathy and support that he has received since he lost his wife. It is good to be associated with such a caring membership.

I am often told how much our residential visits are enjoyed, not only for the varied walking in exciting new places but for the joy of sharing time and conversation over a meal, and afterwards, with people you have come to know and whose company you have enjoy during the regular walks throughout the year. When asked, as occasionally I am, whether our social activities are distracting us from our constitutional duties, I can, on reflection, feel confident that the bonding, the team spirit, that such events engender is the secret of our success. One can discuss where the society should be going, you can ponder upon what you can offer to help achieve that, and be reassured that the training and support is there to help you take on that new challenge.

By offering ever more walks, to ever more members, we are keeping the footpaths open, used and enjoyed. What better way of ensuring their future? Remember, too, that we need District Secretaries to keep pressure on the local councils to resist closures and diversions of fieldpaths for trivial or selfish reasons. We need to keep this vital network intact for the generations to come, to enjoy as much as we are. Take a moment to ask yourself 'what can I do to help with this important work?'

2. THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

The Executive Committee met six times during 2007. As mentioned above, we are losing four long-serving committee members, and as a result we have no less than three vacancies for District Secretaries. This job involves looking at footpath problems, responding to requests for diversions, and checking possible claims for new footpaths. Most of the relevant documents for checking claims are in the County Records Office in Cowley or the Centre for Oxfordshire Studies in the Westgate Library. We badly need people to undertake this work, as it is one of the main planks of our charitable status.

3. STATEMENT OF PUBLIC BENEFIT

Our general work in protecting rights of way is a general public benefit. Our walks program, as a health benefit, is also open and advertised to the public.

4. MEMBERSHIP

On 1 January 2008 our total membership was as follows:

Life members	63
Annual members	<u>399</u>
	462

Of these 71 members joined in 2007; 51 left for various reasons. Our membership has been rising steadily in recent years. Our extensive and varied walks programme attracts new members; committee members, walks leaders and ordinary members also try to introduce new members. Let us be inspired by the rise in membership to keep up the good work, so that we can see a further increase in 2008. The work of the membership secretary and the treasurer has become easier since people now pay more promptly and many more people have opted to pay by bankers' order.

5. FINANCE

The Abstract of Accounts and Balance Sheet are appended in the report. They show how the Society's income has been used and to what extent funds are now being carried forward to meet future liabilities. There was a net revenue deficit of £938 the accumulated balances now stand at £35,005. The net deficit is due to a downturn in the stock market in the second half of the year.

At first glance our Investments at market value, in the Reserve Account section show a marked reduction of £6,662. This is largely due to the sale of units to raise £5,000 to make a grant to the Rambler's Association, the remainder being the stock market downturn. This £5,000 appears in the 'Cash at Bank' section the Current Account 1 balance of £5,858. With the year drawing to a close it was not possible to make the grant in 2007 so the money is held over to 2008.

The new current Social Account, introduced last year, has worked well enabling the Society to pay up-front expenses such as deposits without drawing on the main current account. The idea is that all social events should operate cost neutral; as this is difficult to organise the Social Account acts as an ideal buffer.

Gift Aid

The number of members signing a Gift Aid Declaration has steadily increased. This is most gratifying and is shown by the increase in tax recovered from Inland Revenue. A Gift Aid form appears at the back of this report; perhaps you would consider filling one in if you have not already done so, provided that you pay more tax than the amount claimed by the Society.

Standing Order

The Society is most appreciative of those who pay their annual subscription by Standing Order. This method greatly assists cash flow at the start of the fiscal year. January 2007 was a record year with the bank statement running to six pages.

6. PUBLICITY

We continue to try to advertise our walks as widely as possible via The Oxford Mail and Times and other Press around Oxfordshire. We also send our Walks Programme to Tourist Information Centres and Libraries throughout the County and as many other organisations as we can. Last year an A4 Flyer was sent out to these outlets. However our membership continues to rise so we must be doing something right. The best publicity of all is by word of mouth; once people come on one of our walks they invariably come again. Not only are we a motivated and friendly group but our excellent Walks Programme, supported by our first rate leaders, is both varied and interesting and covers as much of Oxfordshire and surrounding areas as we can.

If you are connected to the Web please visit the site ("www.ofs.org.uk") and give us your opinion so that the site can be updated to suit members. There is a direct e-mail link back to the Webmaster.

The sale of sweatshirts and T-shirts with the Society's logo continues. You can publicise the Society by sporting the logo; orders and sales are being co-ordinated by Elizabeth Adams, who can be contacted on 01865-726031.

7. WALKS PROGRAMME

Here are some interesting statistics about the OFS walking programme in 2007:-

1. There were 102 walks covering approximately 720 miles.
2. The longest walk was 14 miles and shortest was 3 miles.
3. Over 40 leaders provided the programme, including leaders working as a pair.
4. The Steeple Barton snowdrop walk on February 3rd, led by Barry and Helen Burlingham, had no less than 64 walkers taking part.
5. 17 walks leaders were trained in first response (first aid) techniques by John Dawson in the summer at Youlbury Scout Camp.
6. A breakdown of distances shows the programme caters for all distances from long walks to shorter walks, as the following table shows. There were:-
 - 14 walks covering a distance of 9 miles or longer
 - 10 walks covering 8 miles
 - 14 walks covering 7 miles
 - 27 walks covering 6 miles
 - 21 walks covering 5 miles
 - 16 walks covering 4.5 miles or less

Many thanks go to all the walks leaders who provided this programme and to those who organised the all day events, long distance route and residential visit walks.

7. Of the 102 walks, 17 were based out of county, making 83% roughly in county and 17% out of county.

8. The breakdown is as follows:-

- Oxfordshire - 85 walks
- Gloucestershire - 8 walks
- Buckinghamshire - 3 walks
- Berkshire, Warwickshire - 2 walks each
- Bedfordshire, Wiltshire - 1 walk each

9. Michael Payton again led the most walks.

10. 2007 is the first year in the history of OFS when walks have been offered on every day of the week.

8. THE COUNTY COUNCIL AND RIGHTS OF WAY MONITORING GROUP

The Oxfordshire Rights of Way Monitoring Group met twice in 2007.

Comparison of the County Council's performance with previous years is difficult due to the introduction of a new computer system, which had the usual teething troubles. Continuing staff turnover also had an adverse effect, particularly on the tasks teams who were short-staffed as a result. This was aggravated by the drenching summer, which caused vast overgrowth of nettles and other vegetation, and the floods which led, in particular, to damage to several footbridges, so that resources were stretched. However, the decision of the Council to allocate a substantial sum of capital funding to upgrade the Thames towpath (reported under Oxford City) considerably boosted rights of way spending in the County so that overall the picture was positive.

Another subject considered was the Government's consultation on the right to apply for rights of way diversions and extinguishments and we were pleased to note that the County Council along, we understand, with many others argued for the non-implementation of this ill-conceived legislation which would only divert finite resources away from improving the public rights of way network.

In addition, following the automatic reclassification of all roads used as public paths as 'restricted byways', we were pleased to note that the County Council successfully completed a programme to signpost all such routes showing their new status with explanatory notices attached to make the public aware of what the new category signified. While some of the flimsy explanatory notices soon disappeared, we were also pleased to note that few, if any, of the new signposts or arms were vandalised.

9. OUT ON THE GROUND

Cherwell

We are resisting "privacy" diversions at Lower Farm, Bucknell and at Bodicote Mill, where there has been a path beside the house since 1768. We are also opposing a similar proposal at Noke, though we may agree to another on the same path because of gaps in the Definitive Map at that point. A similar gap forced us to accept a diversion (now confirmed) at Knowle Farm, Weston-on-the-Green. We have reluctantly accepted a diversion at Grange Farm, Godington, where long-standing obstructions leave no practical alternative. A route for a diversion around the recycling plant at Yarnton Quarry has been agreed. The Blackthorn assault course has largely been cleared. A claim for a short path in Bicester has been confirmed.

Oxford City

2007 has been an eventful year for public rights of way in and around Oxford City with both good and bad news to report.

At the beginning of the year came the bad news that the County Council had bowed to pressure from BMW, fearing that BMW might relocate Mini production elsewhere, and agreed to apply to the Magistrates' Court to stop up of Roman Way and Oxford BR75, while the City Council followed suit by refusing to exercise its power of veto. This anachronistic procedure, which is legally prescribed when a road is involved, is particularly disadvantageous to user groups as courts expect objecting organisations to be legally represented and (unlike public inquiries where costs are only awarded in the event of unreasonable behaviour) losing parties are liable to costs. Your Committee therefore felt unable to make OFS a formal objector, but informally supported the objection by the Ramblers' Association and our committee member, Nick Moon, was one of a number of private objectors. At the court case, which opened in July and, after an adjournment, was completed in October, the Ramblers' Association and British Horse Society, who were legally represented, and various private objectors did their best in the face of an uphill battle, especially as the County Council were supported by BMW with their own barrister and an array of expert witnesses, but ultimately the Judge ruled in favour of the stopping-up and awarded costs of £19,800 against the Ramblers' Association and £29,700 against the British

Horse Society. As your Committee was grateful to the Ramblers' Association for taking up the fight on behalf of local walkers and in order to encourage them to do this again if the need arises, we have offered the RA £5,000 towards their expenses. On a more positive note, following a tragic accident in which a cyclist on the Thames towpath between Botley Road and Medley was drowned after falling into the river, the County Council decided that the condition of the towpath in this area must be improved and for the first time for a public rights of way project, allocated £300,000 of capital funding. This was topped up by a further £100,000 from the County's Local Transport Plan budget and £50,000 from the City Council to make a total of £450,000. After delays to the necessary survey, caused by floods and obtaining Environment Agency consent, work began in the autumn and a short section south of Rainbow Bridge was finished before high river levels forced its suspension, but the County Council has assured us that work will restart as soon as possible and will eventually be completed. As other sections of towpath, notably near Grandpont and Godstow, are in need of urgent repair, a further bid for capital funding has been submitted for 2008/9, but no decision has been made at the time of writing as to whether it will be awarded.

The footpath alongside the railway at Blackbird Leys, until recently full of everything but the kitchen sink (but including a discarded lavatory bowl), has now been cleared.

As you may have seen in the local press, various threats continue to be posed to footpaths and particularly their surroundings in the vicinity of the Churchill Hospital. A public inquiry into a town green application is about to resume, which might save the precious rural enclave of Warneford Meadow from the philistine hands of developers, while negotiations continue in respect of finding satisfactory diversion routes for Oxford FPs 80 and 113 which have been obliterated by an enormous retaining wall, for which retrospective planning permission had to be obtained.

Finally, another promising piece of news is that, after intervention by OFS and other user groups, negotiations are under way between the County Council, City planners and the developer to resolve the anomaly of Oxford FP121 ending at the fence of former MOD land at Mascall Avenue (until 1991 the City boundary) by extending the path through the redeveloped site to The Slade; no agreement has yet been reached.

South Oxfordshire

In South Oxfordshire, 2007 has been a fairly quiet year for public rights of way. Its highlight took place on 13 July when the local MP, Boris Johnson, opened the Oxford Green Belt Way at Shotover Plain with subsequent walk to Horspath and a fine tea in Horspath Village Hall. Though initiated by CPRE, the Way, which circles Oxford and is intended to highlight the scenic beauty of the Oxford Green Belt and the importance of preserving it in the face of the threat of urban sprawl caused by current government policy, was supported by OFS from the start; the Society made a significant contribution by waymarking a substantial length of the Way. Its guide, which has just been published, is dedicated to the late Rowland Pomfret, whom many members will remember as a long-serving committee member of our Society and District Secretary for the Chipping Norton and Woodstock areas of West Oxfordshire. His widow, Joy, and their sons attended the opening ceremony.

Turning to everyday issues: negotiations with a sympathetic landowner led to the confirmation of an unopposed diversion order to reroute Rotherfield Greys FPs 23 & 24 near Cowfields Farm, (which had become obstructed and difficult to follow when a previous owner converted the farm into a private residence) onto obvious walkable alignments of similar length to the original lines. Following resolution of a problem with unfriendly loose dogs, a diversion was also agreed for Towersey FP4 at Penn Farm, which has been off-line for some years due to the realignment of the farm road, while negotiations are in progress with a view to diverting Benson FP6 to avoid a proposed garden extension, for which planning permission was recently granted. South Oxfordshire District Council also made a diversion order to take Wallingford FP1 (part of the Thames Path) over a swing bridge by the new Oxford University boathouse, but this has been delayed by negotiations to ensure that disruption to path users from the opening of the bridge is kept to an absolute minimum. On a more positive note, however, the end of the year saw the signing of an agreement to create a new footpath with fine views on the slopes of Red Hill at Forest Hill, improving local dog walks as well as the choice of routes for walks from Thornhill Park & Ride.

Vale of White Horse

The infilling of Radley Lakes has been given the go-ahead by the Secretary of State. The application to give the area Town Green status has also been lost; there are rumours of fundraising towards an appeal. A temporary diversion round extended gravel workings at Tubney, and both diversions to restore (almost) the former lines of paths round the lake at Baulking, have been confirmed. Thames Water have held exhibitions regarding their proposed mega-reservoir. All paths between Drayton and Ardington will disappear, along with the road from Steventon to the Hanneys.

The case of Sparsholt BR19, where it is claimed that the bridleway is through a field and not along the canal towpath, was lost when, at the inquiry itself, the applicant produced a 1914 Act of Parliament that extinguished rights of way along the towpath.

West Oxfordshire

The case of the proposed bridleway through Westwell churchyard has been decided in our favour, the path staying on the original line. There is evidence for a footpath through the churchyard and at least five more paths in the area. A privacy diversion at Rest Hill Farm, Worton has been confirmed; similar proposals at Chastleton and Alvescot are being resisted. Diversions at Burford and Standlake (where the lake shore bisects the bridleway) await completion of works before confirmation. We have agreed a diversion out of the garden of Cornbury Park lodge. We have also won a path, part bridleway and part byway, along the Asthall/Swinbrook boundary.

10. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We again would like to thank all those members whose hard work and support have helped make a useful contribution to rights of way work in the county. We are also grateful for the work of our colleagues in the Chiltern Society, Open Spaces Society, CPRE and Ramblers' Association.

OXFORD FIELDPATHS SOCIETY

BANKER'S ORDER FORM

Please complete this form and send it to the Membership Secretary, to change an existing Banker's Order or to start a new one.

To.....
(name and full postal address of your bank)

Sort Code..... Account Number.....

Please pay to Alliance & Leicester Commercial Bank plc, Bootle, Merseyside GIR 0AA, for the credit of the account of the Oxford Fieldpaths Society (Sort Code 72-00-02, Account 85394908) the sum of

£..... (.....)
(amount in words)

on January 1st and thereafter on the same day of each year until further notice.

SIGNATURE.....

NAME.....

ADDRESS.....

GIFT AID DECLARATION

Please complete this form only if you have not already given us a Gift Aid Declaration or your tax status has changed.

Name

Address

Postcode

Please tick one of the following options

I wish the Oxford Fieldpaths Society to treat as Gift Aid Donations all donations (including membership subscriptions) I have paid since 6 April 2000 and all donations (including membership subscriptions) that I may pay from the date of this declaration until I notify you otherwise. I understand that I must pay Income Tax or Capital Gains Tax at least equal to the tax retained by the Society.

OR

I am not a UK taxpayer

Print FULL name

Signed

Date

Please print your full name; we need your first names to claim tax from Inland Revenue.