

OXFORD FIELDPATHS SOCIETY

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

President J Ibbott
Vice President J Trumper

Honorary Officers and Executive Committee, 2010-2011

Chairman Dr. E Adams
General Secretary D Godfrey
Minutes Secretary J Parke
Treasurer J A Eyre
Membership Secretary Mrs G Tyson
Walks Organiser Mrs S Crisp
Publicity P Ewart
Website A Willett
District Secretaries
Cherwell D Godfrey
City of Oxford vacant
South Oxfordshire N Moon
Vale of White Horse J Asbridge
West Oxfordshire vacant
Other Members Mrs V Haskins
Scrutineer of Accounts Janet Isaac
Website address: "www.ofs.org.uk"

Enquiries should be addressed as follows:

Details of the Society's work	Website or Membership Secretary
Membership	Membership Secretary
Walks – specific dates	Leader named in programme

Details of footpath problems should be reported to John Asbridge (above) or directly to Oxfordshire County Council Countryside Service at Signal Court, Old Station Way, Eynsham, Oxford OX29 4TL, tel. 01865-810226. Please ensure that details of the location are as accurate as possible.

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

Chairman's Report

A month after last year's AGM, the result of the general election led to a change in government and a realization that the nation had been living beyond its means. The committee of OFS had come to a similar conclusion a year earlier and subscriptions were raised to cover the running costs of the Society. Although some members declined to renew their subscription, the Society continues to flourish, the membership remains strong and we enjoy a full walking programme throughout the year, as well as very successful social events: the residential trips away, the skittles evening and the Bank Holiday picnic.

Over the year we have heard a great deal about local council cuts and what this may mean for the countryside. Indeed in December, on the early morning Farming Today programme, it was suggested that these cuts would affect the countryside more than other areas of council commitments, resulting in the footpaths becoming effectively closed to the general public. This produced much correspondence in the national press and it is apparent that there are volunteer groups around the country who work with, and without, assistance from the county councils to clear paths, fix fences and stiles, enabling walkers to enjoy our beautiful countryside. It was prescient therefore, that the speaker at the AGM was Howard Dell, from the Chiltern Society who spoke about aspects of their volunteer work – the path maintenance groups and the Donate a Gate Scheme. He also presented the general outline as to how we could develop our own volunteer groups.

With much determination John Eyre, Peter Ewart and others have established contact with the Oxfordshire County Council Countryside Office and we are undertaking a survey of the d'Arcy Dalton Way, trimming vegetation where necessary, replacing waymarks which are damaged or missing and notifying the Council where landowners are remiss in maintaining access to the footpaths. This has to be a seasonal project as wholesale cutting back cannot be undertaken during the bird nesting season. I hope that this will be considered as OFS's contribution to the 'Big Society', but more importantly, it will fulfill the Society's remit as a charity: to be doing public good. Anyone who would like to be involved in this work should contact Peter Ewart. Local parish councils are being encouraged to survey their footpaths and the OCC has produced a manual with guidelines as to what members of the general public are entitled to do to keep footpaths clear, devolving some of the maintenance of the footpaths to us all.

The second contribution we have made to widening public access to the countryside, is that two sums of money have been made to the Chiltern Society to the Donate a Gate Scheme. Currently three gates have been installed in Bledlow and a further six are planned to be placed close to the junction of the Oxfordshire and Chiltern Ways. Our donations have been match funded by the Landfill Tax, so although we have donated money for five gates, nine will have plaques indicating our donations.

The success of the Society depends on the hard work of many: the members of the committee, the walks leaders and of course all members who pull on their boots and go walking, because it is by continuing to walk the footpaths that they will remain open for the next generation of walkers. I would like, however, to mention the contributions made by Peter Ewart and David Godfrey in preparing documents for,

and appearing at, the Chiltern Railway Inquiry, to oppose closures to footpaths across Otmoor. Working with the Ramblers, a closing statement has been submitted and we wait to hear the outcome of the Inquiry.

This year has been one of change for the committee. Earlier in the year Jeff Lampert resigned from the committee. Apart from being a regular walks leader, he maintained the website, uploading the walks programme and acting as the webmaster for general inquiries to the Society. We were fortunate to co-opt A Willett who has taken over the role of webmaster and is redesigning the web site adding new information and links. He has also taken managing the social account of the Society. This year Vaughan Haskins has decided to retire from the committee. Vaughan has been a stalwart member of the committee over many years and her knowledge of all matters concerning the Society has been invaluable. Everyone will be aware of her masterminding the refreshments for the AGM, making the AGM a date not to be missed, so a special thanks to Vaughan. The committee members will miss Vaughan's warm welcome at the start of each meeting, fortifying us with tea, coffee and biscuits for the work ahead.

As the days get longer we all look forward to walking in good weather across paths familiar and those less well known, it is important that the latter are used so they do not fall into disrepair and become impassable. There are over 2,000 miles of footpaths in Oxfordshire so there is plenty of choice to enjoy the countryside with fellow walkers.

2. THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

The Executive Committee met six times during 2010. We still have no less than three vacancies for District Secretaries. This job involves reporting 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, which is in process of moving to Cowley. We badly need people to undertake this work, as it is one of the main planks of our charitable status. We welcome to the Committee A Willett, who was co-opted late in the year as Webmaster following the retirement of Jeff Lampert, whom we thank for his efforts in running the site. Vaughan Haskins retires at the forthcoming AGM, and we need replacements as Ordinary Members. We thank her for her long and indispensable service, especially in providing the wonderful tea and cakes at the AGM; it is not only an army that marches on its stomach.

It has been noted during committee meetings that some members are still paying old subscription rates, including one still paying 50p from the days of the dinosaurs. Please ensure that standing orders are amended to the current rate, which is £10.

3. MEMBERSHIP

On 31st December 2010 our total membership was as follows:

Life members	47
Annual members	<u>362</u>
	409

There were only 24 new members joined this year, considerably fewer than in previous years. We hope recruitment will increase in 2011, new members are always welcome.

This year we had to make a considerable increase in the subscription rate. The previous amount was not sufficient to cover the expense of the two mailings each year. We received only a few letters complaining about the increase but the membership did drop by 120. The increase must have made non-active members consider the situation and decide it was time to 'hang up their boots.'

The change in subscription created a lot of problems with the payments from those who pay by Bank Transfer. Thank you very much to those who did change the amount and to those who sent the extra amount after a reminder.

4. STATEMENT OF PUBLIC BENEFIT

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

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 increase of Income over Expenditure of £617; this was augmented by gains on Investments of £1,373 making total revenue increase of £1,990. The accumulated balance now stands at £27,388.

During the year the Society made a grant of £750 to The Chiltern Society to assist in their programme of replacing stiles with gates to ease access to the countryside. It is hoped that this will become an ongoing commitment.

The value of stocks and shares has shown a slight rise throughout the year; this is reflected in the market value of our M&G Charifund Units. In the 'Cash at Bank' section all the Santander (ex. Alliance + Leicester) accounts show a slight increase.

The current Social Account No. 2 continues to work well, enabling the Society to pay up-front expenses such as holding deposits without drawing on the main current account. The idea is that all social events should operate cost neutral; as this is sometimes difficult to achieve the Social Account acts as an ideal buffer.

The rise in annual subscription to £10 on the 1st January has put our finances into good order and we have been able to make a donation without drawing on reserves.

Gift Aid

The number of members signing a Gift Aid Declaration has steadily increased. This is most gratifying and is clearly shown by the increase in tax recovered from the Inland Revenue. The percentage refunded will decrease when the transitional arrangements resulting from the reduction in basic rate of Income Tax, from 22% to 20%, end. A Gift Aid form now 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. This year was yet another record with the January bank statement running to an

impressive nine pages. However, several members have yet to change their Standing Orders to the new rate; we ask them to do so as soon as possible.

6. PUBLICITY

We have sought to raise the profile of OFS in the past 12 months with Oxford County Council by contributing to the public consultations you will see detailed in this annual report. It is going to be of increasing significance that we take our part in the future developments of the many issues that affect and will increasingly affect our enjoyment of the countryside and use of the 2600 miles of footpaths that we have. This is not so much the conventional publicity of the past advertising our walks we do, with perhaps the occasional appeal for membership but the use of our democratic voice that our membership gives us to publicise the aims of our constitution and improve our rights of way. The work we have done in respect of the Chiltern Rail Public Inquiry, the preparation of the Local Transport Plan have all served to raise our profile with the County Council and we are now embarking on our volunteer work party programme to capitalise on this. In this way our views will have greater influence when future developments are being considered within the County. We also welcome A Willett, who is already hard at work updating the website.

7. WALKS PROGRAMME

Walking Programme Report

Here are some interesting statistics about the OFS walking programme in 2010:-

1. There were 120 walks covering 789 miles; the longest was 17 miles from Chipping Norton to Oxford and the shortest 2.5 miles around Stowe Landscape Gardens.
2. Michael Payton again led the most walks – 12 in total.
3. A breakdown of distances shows the range offered in our programme:-
 - 6 walks covering 3.5 miles or less
 - 16 walks covering 4 plus miles
 - 18 walks covering 5 plus miles
 - 30 walks covering 6 plus miles
 - 25 walks covering 7 plus miles
 - 17 walks covering 8 to 10 miles
 - 11 walks covering 10 miles or longer
4. There were 3 very enjoyable and successful residential walking holidays during the year and thanks must go to the hard working organisers: John Eyre and Sue Crisp for the Long Mynd trip; Liz Adams for the Mortimer Trail and Alison Broadbridge and Tilley Smith for the Hope Cove holiday.
5. Special Events included: Gwyneth Tyson's walk to Dunstable Downs, Brian Colley's and Val Forsdyke's trip to London with a river cruise, Liz Adams' annual outing to the Malvern Hills and Worcester, the Hurley Lock picnic with the Wischnewski's (Martin and Kazie) and the Kirtlington walk and tea with Lew Gammon and Liz Adams.
6. We have a very strong team of walks leaders and continued thanks go out to them for leading walks in Oxfordshire (94 walks) and the surrounding counties as follows:
 - Bedfordshire 1
 - Buckinghamshire 7
 - Berkshire 6
 - Worcestershire 2

Gloucestershire 6

Warwickshire 4

8. THE COUNTY COUNCIL AND RIGHTS OF WAY MONITORING GROUP

The Oxfordshire Rights of Way Monitoring Group met twice in 2010 as intended.

Despite (or perhaps even due to) the economic situation, these meetings were productive in outlining the current position and dispelling some misconceptions, but a lack of concrete figures meant that the County Council was unable to state the extent of cuts or what they would mean on the ground. We nevertheless took the opportunity to press for a concentration on the Council's statutory duties (i.e. to keep paths open and usable, update the Definitive Map, etc.) rather than PR work such as promoting circular walks etc. which people can find from commercial publications or using a map. We also emphasised our willingness to do what we can to assist the County Council in carrying out its duties.

The County Council also had some good news though as the long-term aim to produce an online rights of way map has, at last, been effected and a vacancy in the Rights of Way Office, which we had feared might be left open, had been filled.

OFS has taken an active role in the consultation process for the development of the Local Transport Plan (LTP3) to meet the transport needs of Oxfordshire for the period 2011 to 2030. We have sought to provide a walking group's perspective on how this should be achieved. It became clear very early in this process that walking, cycling and public transport were considered to be working together to provide a key element in our future transport needs. The long consultation process, to which we provided our comments, concluded on January 9 and produced 9 key objectives. At this time it does not appear that any significant expenditure from the public purse will be directed towards providing expensive road space; on the contrary we may see some of this money directed to the far more affordable development of the walking routes that are being seen as a key objective of the new plan. We hope to see this confirmed in the publication of the plan later in the year. Information on this key plan can be found in OCC's web site.

9. OUT ON THE GROUND

Cherwell

The Chiltern Railways inquiry has now ended, and it is possible that we may retain the crossing at Oddington FP6 by Oddington Grange instead of having to divert a mile by way of Oddington Crossing; prospects for the other two closures – Mansmoor Lane (to be diverted west of Holts Farm) and Gosford FP4 (to be closed south of the railway) are more obscure. Our input before the inquiry, backed up by RA and the County Council, also ensured that several closures were replaced by bridges.

The "privacy" diversion at Bodicote Mill has 12 objectors and will go to inquiry. An attempt to extinguish two paths at Westbury (Bucks), which are dead-ends because the connecting path in Mixbury (Oxon) was never claimed, appears to have been abandoned; evidence for the connecting path is lacking, but Westbury Parish Council is claiming it and two other paths, one of which will be affected by HS2; the evidence in railway plans for connections to the dead-ends is too weak to use. We have been consulted on a package at Noke to tie up dead-end paths round Upper Woods Farm.

The diversion of Cottisford FPs 8/9 away from the gardens is going ahead, subject to the provision of gates; the sub-station has already been partially hidden by a fence. The diversions of Noke BR10 on the Green Belt Way and North Newington FP7 at Tythe Farm, also avoiding gardens, have been confirmed. We have been consulted on minor diversions at Souldern and Banbury.

The County Council has now approved the Ardley site for an incinerator. There are plans to sell off two sites at MoD Bicester, one on Graven Hill and the other at Piddington; there is an ancient footpath across the latter which was closed under the Defence Acts, and we are trying to find out whether this can be reopened. The canal towpath under the Wolvercote Viaduct was opened at the end of July.

Oxford City

Following a period with a number of major issues affecting public rights of way in and around Oxford City, 2010 has been a relatively quiet year of consolidation.

All work to reconstruct sections of the Thames towpath between Medley and the Southern Bypass has now been completed, at a cost of £1.75 million; it is to be hoped that the towpath will remain in satisfactory condition for some years.

A further piece of good news is that the Hospital Trust has finally accepted the County Council's designation of Warneford Meadow as a 'town green', so that the threat from development to this valuable green lung in East Oxford has been lifted. What is now needed is to ensure that the land is managed in such a way that the public can make good use of it and that the long-standing obstructions to paths on neighbouring land in the vicinity of the Churchill Hospital are also tackled in order to improve public access to the Meadow.

Following the appointment of Jenny Beardmore as part-time Field Officer for Oxford City, the long-standing problem of obstructions to paths in the Cherwell valley around Marston Ferry Road and the Victoria Arms has received some attention with a number of new kissing-gates and footbridges being installed and we now need to check whether this has resolved all the problems on this network.

South Oxfordshire

In South Oxfordshire, 2010 has been another fairly quiet year on the public rights of way front.

On definitive map modification orders (to add missing rights of way to the Definitive Map etc.): a package of two additions and one deletion at Binfield Heath was confirmed after a public inquiry. The deletion we did not oppose as it arose from a clerical error by the County Council in 1968 which had substituted it for one of the paths now added, the other addition being a path shown on the Inclosure Award.

In addition, diversion orders have been made and confirmed unopposed for Benson FP6 and Goring FP17 after we had obtained concessions from the landowners in the form of an undertaking to create an embankment to prevent Benson FP6 being flooded and the dedication of increased width for an adjacent fenced section of Goring FP17 prone to encroaching vegetation. A further diversion order has also been made for Stanton St. John FP9 to bypass a proposed barn extension together with an extinguishment order for an incorrect alternative route shown on one edition of the Definitive Map. A proposal to divert Checkendon FP12 has also been dropped following an amendment to the plans for a new garage, while we are currently

fighting plans for an inconvenient diversion proposed for Watlington FP1. The order to divert Wallingford FP1 (part of the Thames Path) over the new swing-bridge made in 2007 is, however, still pending due to disputes over attached conditions restricting the frequency and duration of permitted openings of the bridge.

It is hoped that the paths around Castle Hill, Little Wittenham will be reopened late this year; they have been closed because of a fungus disease – *Kletschmeria deusta* – which causes trees to split and fall without warning leaving a 10ft stump.

Turning now to the condition of paths on the ground, the Field Officers, Jonathan Beale and Mark Sumner have made steady progress in tackling the backlog of long-standing problems as well as the steady stream of new problems arising from crops, vegetation and attempts to obstruct or deter path use. While the extent and effect of impending cuts is as yet unknown, an increased level of volunteer effort has also enhanced progress with the Chiltern Society's Path Maintenance Volunteers installing quite a number of kissing-gates in the south of the District to replace poor stiles and Thame/Wheatley Ramblers undertaking a number of small clearance jobs on overgrown stiles and footbridges in the north of the District. It is also hoped that our Society will soon resume undertaking similar work as we did in the 1970s and 1980s before the then organisers were forced to give up on age grounds.

Vale of White Horse

Radley Lakes are now being turned into a nature reserve run by the Northmoor Trust, with improved access for the disabled. The public inquiry into the Thames Water mega-reservoir, which will swallow up all the paths between Drayton and Ardington, has now finished and we await the Inspector's report. A diversion at Frilford FP7 along the Ock through the Millets site has been abandoned by the new owner. We have been consulted on a diversion at Uffington FP9, left over from the days when houses were built without bothering to divert paths around them; the diversion is acceptable except for the fact that the diversion map has the new path along the top of the school fence, which could be painful. Work on the bridge at Sandford Lock has now finished and the King's Arms is again accessible from the towpath.

West Oxfordshire

We are appealing against partial refusal of a claim for a byway from the end of the aptly-named Watery Lane at Charlbury to Dean and against refusal of a claim for a bridleway cutting out some road walking from Dornford Lane to Tittenford Bridge between Rousham Gap and Ludwell; The Order for a byway from the Radford-Kiddington road to White House Farm has been confirmed. The diversion of Hanborough FP5 by the quarry will continue for another three years. A diversion of Enstone FP19 avoiding the farmyard of Manor Farm was abandoned after opposition from the Parish Council.

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 also thank those who go out unheralded with secateurs that live in rucksacks, and clear out the rampant growths that block paths in summer – even those who are in even more danger of being left behind on walks than your Secretary. 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 start a new Banker's Order. To change an existing order this form should be presented to your own bank branch.

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

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

Please pay to Santander UK plc, Bridle Road, Bootle, Merseyside, L30 4GB, 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.