

## **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  
Social Account A Willett  
Membership Secretary Mrs G Tyson  
Walks Organiser Mrs S Crisp  
Publicity P Ewart  
Margaret Jones  
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  
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**

The year 2011 began with deep snow and freezing conditions so that walks had to be cancelled; however it gave way to a most beautiful spring followed by an indifferent summer and a mild autumn and early winter. Despite the inclement start, throughout the year there were around 10 walks a month across most parts of Oxfordshire and our neighbouring counties, so we certainly were actively doing our best to keep the footpaths of Oxfordshire open by walking them. This was the aim of our founding members more than 80 years ago, at a time when footpaths crossing major roads could be negotiated safely. Sadly today some footpaths will cease to be used as access across four lanes of traffic can no longer be contemplated, and even on minor roads, traffic moves at an accelerated pace. As we negotiate roads on walks we must be responsible, walking in single file and facing oncoming traffic where possible. However these inconveniences should not deter us from making the most of the county's varied terrain.

We are also keeping the footpaths open having initiated the new (or renewed) project of volunteering – to survey and undertake light clearance work on footpaths. This work is carried out in conjunction with the County Council and may well become a larger part of the Society's activities as funding for this work by the Countryside Services is being increasingly reduced. To celebrate the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the d'Arcy Dalton Way, which was described by Nick Moon at the AGM, the entire length of the Way was surveyed using large scale Ordnance Survey maps. The walk was divided into manageable sections and the status of every waymark, fingerpost, stile and bridge was noted. Peter Ewart gave the willing helpers a map and instructions as to how to record their findings. In early spring, mostly in fine weather, the survey was completed. Jim Parke and Peter then collated the data which was presented to the Council who were impressed with the quality of the work. Since then the volunteer teams have re-walked the sections where waymarks needed replacing and trimmed back overhanging greenery. Defective stiles and bridges are the responsibility of the landowners and Council and we trust they will be repaired or replaced. Although there is more surveying to be done, the next phase of this co-operative work will be the more active work of installing waymark posts. Guidance is required for this as specialist tools will be used. Looking ahead, it may be possible for working parties to install gates, replacing stiles thus opening up the countryside to the less mobile and families with prams. In the meantime we donated money to the Cotswold Wardens who have installed five new gates on the d'Arcy Dalton Way north of Hook Norton.

Our collective enjoyment of OFS walks is thanks to Sue Crisp who continues to juggle the contributions of leaders into a comprehensive programme. This takes a great deal of time as grid references and public transport all require checking, which she and John Eyre undertake. The walks leaders also have to be thanked for taking time to design or search out new walks, check whether paths are suitable and safe and finally lead the walk. Currently walks leaders comprise about 10% of the membership, it would be wonderful if the responsibility for leading walks could be distributed more widely amongst the members. Among the highlights of the walking year were the residential trip to Dovedale, in the spring, organized by Sue Crisp, the northern section of the Oxfordshire Way during the late Spring Bank Holiday, the London Outing by Brian Colley in August and the trip to Cardigan Bay in September by Alison Broadbridge and Tilley Smith. Tewkesbury was the destination for the annual outing in September. The Skittles evening continues to be very popular, giving an opportunity for the regular walkers and those who walk less frequently to

get together. Pat and Lew Gammon have organised this for several years and have decided to retire from the task. Thank you both for giving us so much enjoyment.

The hard work of all of the committee members ensures the Society runs successfully: Gwyneth Tyson as Membership Secretary maintains the data base of member's details and organizes the two huge mailings each year, the Treasurer John Eyre makes sure the society is operating within its' budget. This year Adam Willett has taken over running the social account and has redesigned the website adding more information. John Asbridge liaises with the Council on failing stiles and obstructed paths, Nick Moon and David Godfrey ensure that diversion applications are closely scrutinized to prevent footpaths becoming extinguished or diverted. Margaret Jones is responsible for publicity. Jim Parke is a superb Minutes Secretary so that all our meetings are properly recorded and reminds me of correct procedures.

Safety on walks is essential and knowledge of first aid could be life-saving in an emergency, to rectify this John and Joyce Dawson organized two evening sessions which taught the 'first response'. One always hopes that none of us will need to put into practice what has been learnt but no matter how careful one tries to be, accidents can and do happen. This report should not end on a pessimistic note; the year has been incredibly successful due to the contributions of all: the committee, the walks leaders and of course the members who walk our footpaths come rain or shine.

## **2. THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE**

The Executive Committee met six times during 2011. 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 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 Margaret Jones, who was elected at the last AGM. Adam Willett has taken over the running of the Social Fund. John Eyre wishes to stand down as Treasurer but will remain on the committee.

## **3. 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.

## **4. MEMBERSHIP**

On 31<sup>st</sup> December 2011 our total membership was as follows:

Life members	44
Annual members	<u>312</u>
	356

During the year 16 new members joined and 40 did not renew their subscription.

It is now 3 years since we had to make a considerable increase in the subscription in order to cover our administration costs. Even at £10 we feel it is good value for money but do understand if some members feel they are not able to walk often enough to get that value. However a considerable number have not increased their Bank Transfer so are still only contributing £4. This amount does not cover the cost of the paperwork and postage for the two mailings each year and the postage is due to increase further in the near future. We appeal to everyone who wishes to keep up their membership to check that their payment is correct. Thank you.

## **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 £79; this was decreased by a reduction on Investments of £11 making total revenue increase of £68. The accumulated balance now stands at £27,456.

During the year the Society made a grant of £780 to The Cotswolds Conservation Board towards provision of five kissing gates to assist their programme of replacing stiles with gates to ease access. We hope this will become an ongoing commitment.

The value of stocks and shares has shown a slight fall throughout the year; this is reflected in the market value of our M&G Charifund Units

With the increase in Social Activity in the Society the Social Account has been separated and is currently being operated by Adam Willett. The Santander, postal account, causes delays; to remedy this the account is being transferred to an over the counter account with Lloyds/TSB. The Social Account has been given a loan of £1,000 to cover additional financial commitments. The account continues to work well, enabling the Society to pay up-front expenses such as holding deposits without drawing on the main current account.

### **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 has decreased with the reduction in basic rate of Income Tax to 20%. The increase in subscription has more than compensated for this. 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.

## **6. PUBLICITY**

In support of our footpath maintenance volunteering and our Donate a Gate scheme, we joined the Ramblers with a joint letter of support for the aims of the Countryside Service to safeguard our rights of Way, which was published in the Oxford Times. We will be following this up with seeking more publicity for the works we have done to date and taking a stand on appropriate Countryside Shows such as the Wychwood Fair. This will give us an opportunity to seek wider support for these works.

## **7. WALKS PROGRAMME**

Here are some interesting statistics about the OFS walking programme in 2011:-

1. There were 123 walks covering 757 miles.
2. The longest walk was 13 miles from Fringford.
3. The shortest walk was 3 miles from the RSPB bird reserve at Beckley.
4. Peter Ewart beat Michael Payton for leading the most walks – 13 in total.

5. A breakdown of distances shows the range offered in our programme: 7 walks of 3.5 miles or less; 15 walks of 4 plus miles; 29 walks of 5 plus miles; 29 walks of 6 plus miles; 18 walks of 7 plus miles; 15 walks of 8 - 10 miles; 10 walks of 11 miles or longer.
6. There were 3 very enjoyable and successful residential walking holidays during the year and thanks must go to the hard working organisers: Sue Crisp for the HF holiday to Dove Dale; Gwyneth Tyson for the Ramblers trip to the Yorkshire Dales and Alison Broadbridge and Tilley Smith for the Cardigan Bay venture.
7. Special Events included: Brian Colley's August trip to London via Little Venice, Liz Adams' annual outing along the river Severn and to Tewkesbury, the Glyme Valley linear walk with Val Forsdyke and a joint walk with the Ramblers to Hampshire led by Elaine Steane. Liz Adams and Eme Pilgrim lead a popular 3 day linear walk along the northern part of the Oxfordshire Way.
8. We have a very strong team of walks leaders and continued thanks go out to them for leading walks in Oxfordshire and the surrounding counties. Our team numbers nearly 40 leaders but we always welcome new ones.
9. Our training programme included a very well presented and organised First Aid course held at Youlbury Scout Camp by John and Joyce Dawson for walks leaders. Many thanks to them for equipping us with knowledge of how to deal with any emergencies that could occur.

## **8. THE COUNTY COUNCIL AND RIGHTS OF WAY MONITORING GROUP**

The Oxfordshire Rights of Way Monitoring Group met twice in 2011 as intended. As was to be expected, these meetings were dominated by discussions of the cuts which eventually amounted to 23%, but it has been gratifying to note that our representations to the effect that the cuts should largely be concentrated on the discretionary PR side of rights of way work and that the statutory work of maintaining the paths and keeping the Definitive Map up to date should be spared have largely been heeded. The ultimate staffing cut of 2.5 posts, in fact, comprises the non-replacement of Keith Wheal, the Head of the Countryside Service, who has retired on health grounds, the loss of a PR post and the reduction in the number of field officers from 4.5 to 4, which means that only half a post has been cut from the vital statutory work, which we were seeking to protect. In addition, the decision in future to fund the replacement and repair of major footbridges from the capital budget also reduces the impact of the cuts by meaning that routine bridge maintenance work will no longer be affected by the need for major expenditure to replace a collapsed or dangerous structure. Our suggestion of deferring for two years the review of the Rights of Way Improvement Plan to allow the effects of the cuts to be factored in also received a favourable response, so that an unexpected side-effect of the cuts seems to be a greater responsiveness of the County Council to our initiatives to mitigate the effects of the cuts in exchange for our efforts to increase volunteer participation in such fields as monitoring and maintaining promoted routes. The Oxfordshire Transport Plan for the period 2011 – 2030, for which OFS had acted as an Amenity Group consultee, had been published, making Walking, Cycling and Rights of Way one of its key objectives. This plan sees development of this objective continuing over the next 20 years as part of overall transport strategy, and we noted that the review of the Rights of Way Improvement Plan was part of this.

In the short term it is apparent that the first casualty of these expenditure cuts will be items classed as non-essential maintenance, meaning most items of improvement as well as maintaining the waymarking. We tabled our report of our first year's efforts that extended to surveying and maintaining the entire 65 miles of the d'Arcy Dalton Way. Our efforts in completing this very extensive first step in our current volunteering program were very well received.

## **9. OUT ON THE GROUND**

### **Footpath Volunteering**

As noted in the report on the Rights of Way Monitoring Group meeting we marked our return to footpath volunteering with the completion of the surveying, way marking and light clearance of the d'Arcy Dalton Way. Following on from this success, the Countryside Service delegated the Countryside Officer responsible for West Oxfordshire, Dan Weeks to work with us to develop our volunteering further. The first fruits of this was a joint walk through of one of the sections we surveyed and for him to provide his feedback on what we had achieved and more importantly on how we could increase our contribution.

Our immediate plan is to work more closely with the Countryside Service, and for our volunteering work to become a more integral part of their footpath maintenance team. As part of this our surveying will be directed towards providing much more detailed information for them to see precisely what may be required without them incurring unnecessary staff cost themselves. It is hoped that this will enable them to prioritize any essential safety related works to be undertaken. We are planning on embarking on undertaking items of non-essential maintenance work ourselves, starting with the replacement of the many free standing way mark posts that we see lying around or propped up & hope that they may still point in the right direction. In addition to this we will continue our surveying, way marking and any light clearance we find, developing the circular walks off the d'Arcy Dalton Way, detailed in Nick Moon's guide books.

### **Cherwell**

The Chiltern Railways inquiry has resulted in the massive diversion of Oddington FP6 and the rerouting of Mansmoor Lane. The allotment holders of Trap Grounds have retained their level crossing on the grounds that it would be even more hazardous to shift heavy loads over the railway bridge. HS2 will affect about six paths in Mixbury, Finmere, Newton Purcell and Godington, including two at Finmere Quarry.

The "privacy" diversion at Bodicote Mill went to inquiry on September 26-28, and the order was confirmed; Ramblers and Open Spaces Society are appealing as a test case to divine what if anything the word "expedient" in the 1980 Act means. The creation and extinguishment package at Noke, to tie up dead-end paths round Upper Woods Farm, has now been confirmed.

The diversion of Cottisford FPs 8/9 has come into operation, works having been completed. Minor diversions at Souldern and Banbury have been confirmed. There are plans to sell off two sites at MoD Bicester, one on Graven Hill with application for 1900 houses, 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. We have responded to proposed limestone extraction around Shenington, asking for diversions to begin and end at their existing termini where possible without involving extra road walking, and for noise protection where needed.

## **Oxford City**

2011 has not been such a busy year for progress on the City's paths as those before. Some further work has been carried out on the major task of restoring the City section of the Thames towpath, but further subsidence on the recently-restored section near Medley suggests that this may be a never-ending job like painting the Eiffel Tower and securing the necessary funding for further work is likely to prove to be increasingly difficult. The long-overdue improvements to the path network around Old Marston yielded at least 18 new gates to replace ill-designed or decrepit stiles as well as several new bridges and have resulted in most of the network in this high-amenity area within easy walking distance of a large population (except FP3) now being easy to use. This year there have been no path diversions within the City, but an additional footpath alongside Bayswater Brook at Barton has been claimed while the claimed path across the railway level-crossing to Aristotle Lane allotments has been rejected.

## **South Oxfordshire**

In South Oxfordshire, 2011 has been a fairly busy year on the public rights of way front, but thankfully the cuts have so far had little effect. August saw the opening of Shiplake FP38 linking the vicinity of Shiplake Station with the cul-de-sac section of Thames towpath near the site of Lashbrook Ferry (which was successfully claimed by the East Berks Ramblers) and Natural England are now considering how best to incorporate it into the Thames Path. A total of six further additional paths have also been claimed in Lambridge Wood near Henley, Dean Wood near Woodcote, Great Haseley and Christmas Common, while we successfully appealed against the rejection by OCC of a claimed path in Great Milton and Waterstock parishes and investigations have commenced into the claimed public right of way across Chippinghurst Stepping Stones linking Chippinghurst to Little Milton. In addition, a permissive path has been created by the gravel operator Lafarge linking Play Hatch to Sonning Eye and negotiations with Lafarge are also in progress concerning the creation of further permissive paths around Caversham Lakes including possibly a link between Sonning Eye and Caversham which would create a circular walk between Reading and Sonning Bridge. The diversion order for Stanton St. John FP9 at Breach Farm and the extinguishment order for an incorrect alternative alignment of the same path have been confirmed thus legalising the route of the Oxford Green Belt Way walked by most local people. The diversion of Benson FP6 at the back of Preston Crowmarsh has come into effect after completion of necessary works. Diversion orders have also been made for Watlington FP1 and various paths affected by the Great Western Park development at Didcot. These have, however, been held up due to the sloppy drafting of the orders which contain a number of mistakes. Negotiations about further diversions at Great Western Park have also been hindered by Thames Valley Police preferring paths to be diverted alongside roads whereas we consider it safer and pleasanter for the paths to remain segregated from the new roads, particularly as the optical continuity of radial paths leading from the town to the rural path network is lost if they are diverted along roads. The order to divert Wallingford FP1 (part of the Thames Path) over the new swing-bridge made in 2007 is also still pending due to disputes over attached conditions restricting the frequency and duration of permitted openings of the bridge, while a proposed minor diversion of Benson FP8 appears to be uncontroversial.



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 constant stream of new problems arising from crops, vegetation and attempts to obstruct or deter path use and we hope it will be possible for this to be maintained despite the cuts.

### **Vale of White Horse**

Radley Lakes have become a nature reserve run by the Northmoor Trust, with improved disabled access. The Thames Water mega-reservoir has been rejected. An order for a minimal diversion of Pusey FP4 around a garden has been made. The order to extinguish a built-over piece of Milton RB13 at Rowstock, leaving 7m width still available, has been confirmed. The order to stop up a part-width of St. Helen Without FP2 along the Wootton boundary has gone to the Secretary of State. It is proposed to divert Drayton FP17 back to the junction with Peep-o'-Day Lane, avoiding the bridleway currently used by lorries.

### **West Oxfordshire**

Appeals in the claims at Wootton and Charlbury have succeeded. Diversion proposals at Downs Road, Witney for a proposed roundabout, at Eynsham to put the path behind the OCC offices along the existing track, and at Idbury FP4 to connect a cul-de-sac with the network, are ongoing. A diversion of Enstone FP15 avoiding the drive has been confirmed, as has the claim alongside Swinbrook churchyard through Pebble Court. The diversion at Cornbury Lodge is going to the Secretary of State.

## **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, and clear out the rampaging Triffids that block paths in summer. 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 1<sup>st</sup> ..... and thereafter on the same day of each year until further notice.

SIGNATURE.....

NAME.....

ADDRESS.....

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**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.