



# OXFORD FIELDPATHS SOCIETY

## NEWSLETTER

Issue 15: September 2009

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### From the Chairman

The society continues to go from strength to strength as this summer's walks programme shows – sixty walks in six months and at least two each month accessible by public transport. We are certainly fulfilling the aims of the Society to ensure footpaths in the county remain open and walked.

After a cold and unusually snowy winter the spring flowers seemed more abundant than previous years so we enjoyed walks that were visually stunning. The warm and wet summer has produced verdant paths, in some places almost impassable, such that a pair of secateurs in the backpack is as essential as a bottle of water and a banana.

Ensuring the paths, stiles and gates remain in good order is essential and problems are reported to the County Council, which has an ever increasing list to deal with. The Committee is considering ways in which we might make a contribution to assist in the improvement of stiles, therefore making the countryside more accessible to Society members and the general public, and are in preliminary negotiations with the County Council to upgrade stiles with kissing gates.

The charitable status that the Society enjoys requires us to provide benefit to the public as a whole and not just the membership, we do this by publicising the walks in the local press, and this new project will be a further example. We would like to hear from members of other projects which we could be involved with, as without new ideas and projects the Society will stagnate.

I am very aware that the Society continues to flourish because of the contributions of all members, so on behalf of the Committee, thank you.

### INCREASE IN ANNUAL SUBSCRIPTION FROM 2010.

It was after much heart searching on the part of a small sub committee, then by the whole of the Executive Committee, that a decision was made to increase the annual subscription rate to £10. Yes it is a large increase, especially in the present financial climate, but we do feel it is justifiable.

The present very low rate of £4 has not increased for 8 years since 2002. During that time running costs have increased considerably, printing, postage, and insurance, to name but a few. For the past four years our income from subscriptions has not covered our running costs. This shortfall has had to be made up by using income from our dividends.

In 2009, we have already spent well over half of our income and we still have a Newsletter and mailing to pay for in September.

Now some people will wonder why we are going to charge more when the Society has considerable assets which do provide a dividend. We are of course a Registered Charity. As such we are bound to give support to appropriate charitable causes as listed in our constitution. The Society was founded in 1926. One of its aims is to help in the preservation and creation of Rights of Way which would significantly affect the enjoyment of the countryside by the users of such Rights of Way. One of the ways listed for achieving its aims is by arranging organised walks and other such activities.

We have given no charitable support for the past four years. The last was a donation towards the rewaymarking of the Darcy Dalton Way in 2004. We have also given support to Woodland Trust. Last year we gave financial help to the Ramblers Association in their fight against the closure of a footpath at the BMW site in Cowley. This could only be done by selling some of our assets.

Your committee feel that we should uphold a motion passed in 2001, that the day to day running costs of the Society should be covered by subscriptions and that income from investment be used for charitable purposes. We have some plans for this in coming years, such as the replacement of some broken stiles by kissing gates on walks like the Oxford Green Belt Way. This would make the routes more amenable to disabled and elderly walkers. We would welcome other suggestions from members.

For those who feel £10 is too much, do look at the subscriptions rates for other societies and we think you will find ours is good value for money. We offer a good number of walks and an ever expanding social programme. Compare this with the cost of a visit to the cinema, a bottle of good wine or a meal out.

We hope therefore that you will still support us and pay the new rate. If you pay by Standing Order please could you notify your bank now or at the latest before the end of this year. We cannot change your bank arrangement. You can of course help to increase our income further by signing a Gift Aid form, if you have not already done so.

## Footpath Matters Achtung! Crash!

We have been hit at 100mph by Chiltern Railways, owned by Deutsche Bahn, who wish to upgrade the Oxford-Bicester line to this speed. The result will be numerous diversions and closures along the line; the most serious of these are:

(a) closure of the path across North Oxford golf course, removing the last remaining east-west link close to Oxford and effectively closing the Kidlington Circular Walk; (b) closure of Wendlebury FP2 south of the railway over the SSSI; and (c) removal of the path from Weston-on-the-Green to Charlton-on-Otmoor which is to be diverted to Oddington. In addition, the Oxfordshire Way is to be diverted along Islip FP4, crossing the railway by a bridge, then past Brookfurlong Farm to rejoin the route north of the railway. This is probably inevitable as the existing crossing involves walking along the railway for about 70 metres. Also the Oxford Green Belt Way is to be diverted to the bridge at Northfield Farm. All the crossings north of the M40 are to be retained with minimal diversion.

### Splash!

According to the BBC website there is to be a public inquiry into the proposed Great Steventon Reservoir; the Environment Secretary has stated that there is “not enough detail” in Thames Water’s Resources Management Plan (which seems to be as leaky as its pipes).

### Other Matters

We are receiving the usual number of “privacy” diversions; most of them are minor but some raise issues of public enjoyment. The diversions at the cancer centre have been confirmed; the Inspector expressly stated that it was not his role to consider alternatives, and this would appear to be correct on a literal reading of the law; perhaps the only way to put up an alternative route is to maintain that it trumps the “expediency” of the order route. A claim to upgrade several paths in Newington and Stadhampton to BOAT and bridleway has been rejected. The path from the dead-end at Shiplake (FP37) to Mill Lane has been confirmed, making a continuous link from towpath to road.

David Godfrey

## Residential trip with a difference – Gradbach September 2008

This was a new venture for OFS – to take over part of a Youth Hostel for a weekend walking.

Last September 15 of us took over the farm part of Gradbach Youth Hostel which is in a beautiful part of the Peak District, though access is along a narrow and

winding road with a sharp hairpin bend on the final turn into towards the hostel.

### Setting out from Gradbach



Photo: Eme Pilgrim

For some of us it was a trip down memory lane youth hosteling – sharing a dormitory, mucking in with cooking breakfast and clearing up before we left.

Gwyneth’s plans were comprehensive – a computer programme calculated how much food would be consumed by the group even allowing extra for the number of men in the group! Consequently we were extremely well catered for breakfasts and packed lunches.

### The bridge at Three Shires Head



Photo: Gwyneth Tyson

Saturday morning dawned fine and sunny and we set off for Three Shires Head, disaster nearly struck as Michael and I were so busy talking we turned left instead of right as we came down to the stream and would have ended walking in the wrong direction, however Gwyneth put us on the right track and it was a lovely walk to the bridge that marks the junction of three counties Cheshire, Staffordshire and Derbyshire.

It was far too early to turn back to the hostel so we walked on to the Cat and Fiddle Pub – the highest pub in England which is on the A537 a winding road between Macclesfield and Buxton, much loved by motorbike enthusiasts.

Large mugs of tea and coffee seemed to be the beverages of choice! The journey back to the hostel took us through Wildboarclough village. After showers and a change of clothes it was off to the local pub for a really good meal, and we all slept well despite the bunk beds.

On Sunday we walked from the hostel to the Roaches a gritstone outcrop overlooking the Cheshire plain, first following Black Brook through Gradbach Wood and then a steady upward climb to get to the ridge itself. The views from the ridge were lovely – lush farm land, plenty of cows and the huge expanse of water that is Tittesworth Reservoir.

The Trig point marked that we were 505m above sea level.

#### Success! we reached the top of the Roaches



Photo: Gwyneth Tyson

We stopped for a break by a pool and then started the progressive descent back through mostly farm land, though I have to say that some of the paths were not well marked. I had tried the walk out earlier in the summer as my sister lives in the area, so even having walked it before there were still points where the path was not obvious.

Time for a cup of tea, and for me a complete surprise, a cake in celebration (a week in advance) for my birthday. Sadly for some of us it was the drive home back to Oxford but the lucky ones went to Buxton for a night out at the Opera House and a more leisurely journey back. In all it was a great success - good company, walking, food and drink, so on behalf of all of us, thank you Gwyneth for organising the trip and a personal thanks to Emerita for the surprise birthday cake, I can't believe I didn't see it in the boot of my car!

Elizabeth Adams

#### Skittles April 09

Once again the skittles evening was held at Sturdy's Castle in April. Forty two keen and eager members gathered for the annual event. . The event has become so popular that a limit of 40 participants had to be made. Brian Colley arrived early, having polished the "OFS plate" that his team won the previous year. The plate stood in a prominent position throughout the event encouraging all to be part of the winning team.

The event was ably organised by the Gammons, Lew arranged the teams and ensured that the event ran smoothly while Pat kept the scores. We all thank them for their time and effort.

The food was good and plentiful and this year we managed to keep the cream off the walls after being given a demonstration of how to operate the pressurised dispenser. Participants seemed to prefer salad rather than chips – perhaps this was a desire to remain competitive in the second half of the evening.

Styles of play differed wildly with deliveries ranging from genteel slow to powerful high speed where the object seemed to be to disable the people replacing the skittles.

The evening climaxed with the final between (you have already guessed) the team led by Brian Colley and a team led by John Eyre. After a needle contest Brian's team was victorious yet again.

#### The Winning Team



Photo: John Eyre

This gave our Chairman, Liz Adams, her first official duty in presenting the trophy to Brian and his team. A great time was had by all.

So a very pleased Brian was the last to leave  
John Eyre

## Calling all members/ potential leaders!

I have recently led my first walk. I did this because I have been a member for a few years and in that time I have enjoyed so many walks I would never have ventured to try on my own. For this enjoyment I have to thank all the leaders who frequently and regularly put themselves forward to lead a walk.

As members we are many in number, and those leaders are few in number, so to show our appreciation of the efforts made by these leaders and the committee members, who work on our behalf, I thought a few more of us could step forward as leaders. I feel confident in encouraging those of us who hesitate for various reasons because I can reassure them all that they will be well supported.

First of all, Sue Crisp, as Walks Programme Organizer, sends you a comprehensive leaflet of 'Instructions and guidance for walk leaders'. In addition, footpaths are much easier to follow in the new 1:25 000 scale maps, and publications, available in the library, on tried walks by Nick Moon of OFS and Alan Spicer et al of the 'Oxford Polytechnic' are excellent support.

Secondly, I have found, experienced leaders are very willing to offer advice on routes or do a recce with you. I found it helpful to walk the route a few weeks before the nominated date, but more importantly, to walk it again during the week of the walk. On the day, if your memory or your map-reading fail you temporarily, all is not lost; as it happened to me, two kind souls rescued me with their expert map-reading skills and we were back on track again, our reward was to find an even better spot for lunch (thank you Robert and John!).

**Emerita (Eme) Pilgrim**

## OFS Residential Visit to the Isle of Wight 29 May – 2 June 2009

Our visit to the Isle of Wight began on Friday, 29 May and, as usual for an OFS holiday, it was a lovely hot and sunny day. There were 40 in the group and everyone arrived in good time at Lymington for the scheduled IOW ferry to Yarmouth at 11.15 a.m. Unfortunately car space on the 11.15 a.m. was limited so some members of the group had to travel on a later ferry. Nevertheless, we all arrived at our respective hotels in good time to check in and prepare for our first day of walks.

The walk led by Sue Crisp enjoyed spectacular cliff top views along the path to Shanklin while John Eyre's group headed to Brading Down for an inland walk on the Nunwell Trail, sampling some delicious ice cream en route.

Evening briefing sessions and dinner took place at the Riviera Hotel where entertainment of live music was available each night and encouraged some fine

singing and dancing, for those who still had the energy.

## Looking back to Sandown



Photo: Liz Adams

Saturday the heatwave continued. We had a choice of four activities – three walks and a full day's cycling. The eight intrepid cyclists led by Peter Ewart set off from Sandown on a route that took them through Newport and on to Cowes, largely on the recently completed traffic free Railway Path and through a marshland nature reserve – a return trip of 38 saddle sore miles, including one puncture. Lunch was at Carisbrooke Castle with time to enjoy the spectacular views from the castle walls and top of the keep.

## A "hot" group in front of Carrisbrooke Castle



Photo: Gwyneth Tyson

The long walk started at Godshill, a picturesque, chocolate box village with old thatched cottages. The route went north along the Yar River Trail, passed by Carisbrooke Castle and returned via the Shepherds and Worsley Trails. A grassy field and shady tree was the venue for a picnic lunch and relief from the burning sun. Refreshed, the walk continued through open countryside and stunning flowery meadows. A memorable walk that stretched from 13.3 miles to 15.3 miles - there were no dancing feet that night!

On Sunday, a few of the exhausted walkers and cyclists from the previous day took the opportunity to relax and visit Osborne House and gardens followed by a dip in the sea at a small local beach. Serendaded by the song of the skylarks, those who chose to walk were not disappointed with the scenery, sea views and cloudless skies.

#### Looking towards St Catherine"s Point



Photo: Liz Adams

Monday, another tropical day. A good choice of walks available, coastal and inland, circular and linear, by train, bus or direct from hotel. Places visited included, Shanklin, Nunwell Trail, Culver Cliff, Bembridge Windmill, Yar River Trail, Tennyson Trail, Bowcombe Valley, Brightstone Forest, Compton Down, Freshwater Bay.

#### The last walk on the Yar River Trail



Photo: Liz Adams

Tuesday, the last day of a lovely holiday. After breakfast we packed our cars and set off for Yarmouth / Newton Harbour for final walks led by John Eyre and Sue Crisp. An opportunity to enjoy the scenery and wildlife along the estuary, lunch, a final Isle of Wight ice cream, a stroll around Yarmouth and a paddle in the sea.

A Big Thank You to all the Committee Members, the Walk Leaders and to Everyone involved in organising

such a memorable walking holiday. Can't wait for next year, same weather again, please. LONG LIVE OFS!!

#### Alison Broadbridge and RoseMary Barron

#### The Perils of an Un- Reconnoitred Route

As a fairly experienced cycle rider the 35 mile ride from Sandown to Cowes via a lunch stop at Carrisbrook Castle was a good ride, particularly on a mountain bike. To lead my team of 8 stalwart riders, many of whom had not ridden a bike for a number of years, successfully to Cowes along Sustrans cycle route 53, was a privilege.

#### The Cycling team sets out



Photo: Alison Broadbridge

It was perhaps over confidence that was to mar the day. Resumption of the ride after our lunch stop resulted in a moment or two of difficulty route finding in Newport, resolved by some very keen eye sight spotting a well hidden Sustrans sign.

The return through Newport was an altogether greater problem, when once again I not only failed to find the route but managed to lose the whole cycling group. One minute they were there, the next swallowed up by the one way streets and pedestrian precincts that had evolved after Sustrans had sign posted the route. My excuse is that the Tourist Office were only to happy to provide the information that I was not the first to discover the problem and would I please write to the Council to complain. If anyone would care to attempt the route themselves the trick is to know that cycle route 53 changes to Newport Council's Troll Trail and is signposted accordingly. Although I am told that once again our eagle eyed sign spotter saw the one remaining cycle route 53 sign, which I understand was handily at the top of lamp post column & under some later sign bracketry.

I was saved by the vigilance of our sharp eyed sign spotter who even spotted me, lost in the wastelands of Newport's one way streets and led me out of town to regroup with the others.

Phew I thought, that was enough for one day, but no. Our attempt to catch up with the advance party resulted in poor John Eyre slowing with what proved to be the cyclist's nightmare, the dreaded puncture and yes I cycled past carrying all the repair kit you could wish for in the cycle hire rucksack tool kit. Too much later I found our party was one short and yes I had managed to lose John. A frantic ride over quite a number of miles back to Newport, peering into the old track side ditches, fearing the worst I can tell you, weighed down by failed responsibility and with what proved to be quite an uncomfortable and superfluous tool kit – no sign of John.

My return ride to the riders awaiting my return after my failure was not one I would care to repeat. This became worse on the long ride back as I was going as fast as I could manage back to Sandown and, just to add to my discomfort, as I was speeding around a corner I had to avoid a head on collision by taking to the nettle filled ditch that I deserved.

Oh Joy! My relief on returning to the hotel to find John comfortable ensconced there was palpable to all. Well John's comfort that is, apart from what I was told, was a long wait and parking of the bike in a kind Islanders' house, a bus trip to Sandown and dare I say the effects of a long bike ride!

**Peter Ewart**

### **Walking in the Sundon Hills**

On a bright breezy Saturday at the end of March a few stalwarts of OFS met at Thornhill P & R to drive to Harlington, near Luton, for a bracing walk in the Sundon Hills.

Climbing up out of Harlington we joined the Icknield Way and followed this to the Sundon Hills Country Park entrance. Here the Way joined the John Bunyan Trail, the path he used to take when out preaching.

#### **Sundon Hills**



**Photo: Gwyneth Tyson**

We continued along the ridge with fine views over the Bedfordshire plain. As we approached the summit of Sharpenhoe Clappers the wind was howling through

the trees. After a lunch break by the Monument we descended the steep steps to Sharpenhoe village then continued on the John Bunyan Trail eventually curving back to Harlington. As we climbed the path through the last field we came to the old oak tree that John Bunyan used to use as a pulpit.

#### **Preaching to the converted!**



**Photo: Gwyneth Tyson**

After a brief sermon from the 'Rev. Michael' we were soon back at the village hall car park and a refreshing drink in the local pub. For those who enjoyed this walk I would like to venture in that direction again to walk on Dunstable Downs.

**Gwyneth Tyson**

### **Barbeque at Hurley Lock July 2009**

Martin & Kazuyo put a lot of effort into organising a summer barbeque as a new event for the OFS. It was doubly unfortunate that it was to suffer from both an enforced change of date and a weather forecast that proved to all to common this summer and was unduly pessimistic. Nonetheless a hard core of 16 members enjoyed Martin & Kazuyo's efforts with a morning walk in what proved to be splendid weather, in a part of the Thames valley that was fresh to most of us. The highlight of the walk was undoubtedly the Sultan of Brunei's idea of what constituted a comfortable home, palace would be a more appropriate description, for a few horses.

Martin completed our walk to the barbeque site along what was an impressively clean sandy section of river that was being enjoyed by a number of swimmers and families playing in the water on what proved to be a pleasant summer day.

The barbeque site was on the island formed by Hurley lock, Martin & Kazuyo kept us well entertained as the fire got up to cooking temperature with an impromptu raffle. First prize was a well thought out "Champagne Cruise" on the river for five people on Martin's boat. The lucky five arrived back to the barbeque well up to speed for cooking.

**Peter Ewart**

## Annual London Outing 09

This year the London Outing, ably organised and led by Brian Colley, took place on the 4<sup>th</sup> August. Twenty members met at Thornhill P & R to board the "Oxford Tube" for London, Victoria. Fortunately we all got on the same coach.

Alas there was a light drizzle when we arrived at Victoria but fortunately this soon ceased and the remainder of the day was dry if a little grey and overcast

Under Brian's shepherding we set off down Pimlico Road heading for Chelsea. We passed by Viscount Linley's bespoke furniture showroom. Looking through the large windows we could see a range of individual furniture. As nothing was priced we assumed it was above our budget.

At the gates of the Chelsea Hospital we suffered our only set back. Visitors are allowed into the grounds but 20 reprobates, many with rucksacks, gave the guard minor apoplexy! A compromise was reached and we were let in, four at a time, with a suitable gap between each group.

While waiting we gathered some details of the Chelsea Pensioners. There are currently 360 in residence, now including three women, but this will increase to 420 when some extensive renovation work is completed next year. To qualify you have to have completed 22 years of military service or get in sooner if you have won a medal. Pensioners have to surrender their military pension in exchange for keep although they are allowed to retain their state pension for personal needs.

The grounds were immaculate, the grass being mown in lines superior to Wimbledon. The buildings were all well maintained. An unusual feature was the electric mobility scooter parks – a good salesman had cornered a great market.

### Bligh's tombstone in St Marys Church



Photo: Brian Colley

A stroll along the Embankment brought us to Lambeth Bridge where we crossed the river to Lambeth Palace. Lunch was taken here as a picnic or a meal in the adjacent café. Close by the palace is St. Mary's church – famous on two counts, now the Museum of Garden History while Captain Bligh, of Bounty fame, is buried in the churchyard. His tomb is of Coade stone topped by a symbolic breadfruit.

After a group photo we sauntered on to re-cross the river over Westminster Bridge. As we neared "Big Ben" we joined the hundreds of tourists to hear the clock strike two.

### Group at Big Ben - Timed it right to hear the clock strike



Photo: Brian Colley

Our route back to the coach took us through St. James's Park where the Grey Squirrels were accepting food from tourists – very rural for a large city. Soon we were at Grosvenor Gardens to board the coach back to Oxford.

A strange sight was a DUKW (an amphibious army vehicle) full of tourists making its way up river very low in the water. Later we saw the same vehicle, this time using its wheels, heading east long the embankment. For the technical minded the designation DUKW is not a military pun, but comes from D a vehicle designed in 1942, U is utility, K is all wheel drive and W indicates two powered rear axles.

An excellent day out; well done Brian.

John Eyre

## Isle of Wight Day-trip August 2009

A week before we thought six would be our party this year, but four more people applied just before, including a Canadian visitor. We were also concerned about the weather, but it all was wonderful on the day! Sunshine from dawn to dusk, a pleasant breeze later, and even the ferry left early. We were all thrilled with the new ferry, but a bit surprised on the way back, when we had an extra 20 minutes to bask in the sun while the ferry sat motionless in the middle of the Solent. Was it a problem with the tides? Peter asked afterwards.

Our Canadian professor was impressed with views of Hurst and Yarmouth castles, both dating back to the 16<sup>th</sup> century, the latter with Elizabethan chimneys, and also with the late Anthony Minghella's father's ice-cream cafe on Yarmouth pier.

We stopped along the track to Freshwater to see the birds in the tidal River Yar.

#### A break along the River Yar



Photo: Helen Burlingham

Most were seagulls, but Cath saw a godwit among them. After lunch watching divers in Freshwater Bay with an occasional commentary from Robin, who has been a diver, we were on our way up Tennyson Downs. The attraction at the cliff top was a new memorial to former Poet Laureate, Alfred, Lord Tennyson, who was born 200 years ago on August 6<sup>th</sup>, 1809, and who often walked 30 miles a day here.

Next to the original tall obelisk to commemorate him, there is a cairn, covered with a black slate block on top, a toposcope which indicates the directions and distances to London, Cape Finistere, etc, and even to the North Pole from that point. It has a written inscription from a Tennyson poem, "Crossing the Bar", around the four sides of it.

We had seen this monument being unveiled in the local BBC news two days before.

#### The new Tennyson memorial



Photo: Helen Burlingham

The spectacular red-pink of the heather on the hillside greeted us as we descended from the Downs and more on Heddon Warren in the distance, which contrasted well with the blue of the sea beyond it. There were far fewer people on the way down, but many butterflies, mainly tiny Chalk-hill blues, Cabbage whites, Heath Browns and Painted Ladies attracted by the flowers on the path to Totland Bay. A large number of swallows were flying around a cottage with a delightful garden further down. There was even a wedding at the Church on the way and we saw the bride in her Rolls Royce.

At Totland Bay the tide was in, but there was still room to have a paddle and time for an ice-cream. With a high tide at Colwell Bay, we just about squeezed past more sunbathers and on to the tiny amount of remaining sand, before we went inland again along the cliff and through a lovely wood to Fort Victoria. We had a cup of tea at the cafe and then it was a relatively short walk back to Yarmouth, the ferry and home.

Helen Burlingham

Thanks to all those who have submitted articles and pictures. If you would like to submit an article for the next issue of the Newsletter, then write it up as soon after the event as possible, while the memories are fresh. You will see that three of the events in this newsletter occurred in the last month. These can be handed in to any member of the Committee or sent electronically by email via our website at [www ofs.org.uk](http://www ofs.org.uk)