



OXFORD FIELDPATHS SOCIETY

NEWSLETTER

Issue 19: September 2013

From the Chairman

First I would like to express my thanks to my predecessor, Liz Adams, for her leadership of the Society over the past 4 years. During her time in office the Society introduced the policy of making grants to replace stiles by gates at a number of footpaths throughout the county, and in particular those on the d'Arcy Dalton Way and the Oxfordshire Way. In this activity the Society is furthering one of its principal objectives which are to improve the rights of way and access to open spaces in the County.

The Society also embarked on detailed surveys of the d'Arcy Dalton Way and the circular walks associated with it. This information has been passed on to the Countryside Access Service of the County Council and it has been pleasing to note that improvements to the path infrastructure have been made to remedy the problems which the survey identified.

The Society was saddened by the death of its long serving President and former Chairman, Jack Ibbott, in December. Jack had been a doughty fighter on behalf of walkers in the countryside. He was in the forefront of the campaign in the late 1940s and early 1950s when existing footpaths needed to be identified and given the legal protection of being shown on the definitive maps of public rights of way.

The Executive Committee considered who should replace Jack and the name of Sir Hugo Brunner, former Lord Lieutenant of Oxfordshire, was its unanimous choice. The Committee is delighted that Sir Hugo was pleased to accept the Presidency and in that capacity he came to introduce himself and to give a send-off at the start of the first Jack Ibbott Memorial Walk on June 29th.

Last year the Society took an exhibition stall at the Wychwood Country Show. This was deemed to be a very successful event as it gave an opportunity for us to talk to many interested members of the public, most of whom had neither heard of the Society nor knew of its work. This year the Society has taken stalls at four events: the Abingdon Air Show, Burford Fair, the Vale of White Horse show at Uffington and Wychwood County Fair and I am very grateful for those members who man the stalls.

We welcome three new members of the Committee - Mike Wykes who takes over from John Eyre as the Society's Treasurer, Lesley Fraser and Janice Ure. I welcome the contribution they are going to make to the future management of the Society.

Fund Raising

Please update your shortcut to Amazon to <http://www.amazon.co.uk/exec/obidos/redirect-home?tag=oxfordf-21&site=amazon>. Anything bought using this link will result in a donation to the Society.

The Wychwood Way

August Bank Holiday, 2012

Saturday – 10.5 miles – 12 walkers

Everyone arrived at Stone Farm, Lidstone well on time. The farmer had very kindly allowed us to park there. We drove half the cars to Woodstock and started walking at 9.30am. We passed through Blenheim Park, along Akeman Street and through Stonesfield. We were then on the Saltway. We could see dark clouds all around but were lucky to be on the receiving end only a few times: one of them being lunch break when we all managed to huddle under some bushes. We arrived back at our cars for 2.00pm having made really good time.

Sunday – 13 miles – 10 walkers

Again, everyone arrived at Leaffield Village Hall early and we drove to Stone Farm to start walking at 9.15am. It was a beautiful day and we set off through some stunning countryside with sweeping views over the Glyme Valley. We had some road walking but were soon into panoramic views of cornfields which had been freshly harvested. We passed through Chadlington and the pretty hamlet of Dean where David Cameron resides. Fortunately this time we could enjoy our lunch break in sunshine overlooking the River Evenlode. We then set off refreshed through Ascott-under-Wychwood where we learnt about the Ascott Martyrs (17 women sentenced to hard labour in 1873 for supporting their husbands' trade union, and released in an early act of Sisterhood by Queen Victoria!) arriving back in Leaffield at 2.45pm.

Monday – 11.8 miles – 9 walkers

We left our cars at Woodstock and drove to Leaffield to start our walk at 9.15am. We were soon on Akeman Street once more. We had a coffee stop in the churchyard of the lovely village of Ramsden and were soon admiring the sweeping downland views again; unexpected in our local landscape. We again lunched in a churchyard, at North Leigh, and set off through East End and Coombe. We then re-entered Blenheim Park with its fine views of the Palace and lake. This was the only day that we encountered stiles; three in all. Despite the foreboding weather forecast we had only a very light sprinkling of rain.

Blenheim Park



Photo: Val Forsdyke

Arriving back at 3.30pm we soon established ourselves in the garden of a tea shop in Woodstock for well-earned tea and cake. Everyone was in high spirits after being in such excellent company for the past three days.

Val Forsdyke & Judith Secker

Diversions, etc

The modification order for the path from Milton Common to the middle of Waterstock Golf Course has been through the procedures and is awaiting decision.

The claim to upgrade Stonesfield BR6 (part of the Oxfordshire Way, opposite the bridleway to Charlbury) to byway, which would have meant cars being able to use it, has been rejected. The applicant, who put in the claim in order to get another vehicular access, no longer lives in the area.

The variation order on Newton Purcell BR15 has been confirmed and the correct line is now clear of jungle.

The cleared Newton Purcell BR15



Photo: David Godfrey

The diversion order for the path at Haywards Close, Henley has been issued but has its compass points all mixed up and will have to be corrected.

We have recently been consulted on a claim for part of Charles I's escape route in Wolvercote, crossing the A43 on the level (but since Pixey Mead is access land, people will use one of the underpasses instead); a proposed diversion to take a path out of a deer farm in West Challow (an improvement, as the proposed line is higher and drier); at Goring Heath, where two alternatives (one used for 30 years) have been proposed for a path through an industrial site; and at Highmoor, where it is proposed to move a path out of a garden with no facing windows to a route full of protruding tree roots.

Other Matters

A nice long walk is an excellent opportunity to do a spot of clearance along the way; to which end I decided to walk from Summertown to the memorial walk from Dorchester on June 29. The result is that the Roman Way is now clear from Blackbird Leys to Toot Baldon and from Marsh Baldon to Dorchester (the fallen tree I reported on an earlier visit was removed by OCC within three weeks). I have also been doing clearances when checking walk routes. On walks which I am not leading I often find myself turning into a one-man clearance team (which on one occasion turned into a two-man team when someone borrowed my second pair of secateurs).

After a number of complaints OCC have re-hung all the gates on Hampton Gay FP1 (which goes south-west from Bletchington) and the tripwire south of these should also be clear by now.

Cherwell District Council has decided to research their "ancient ways" in the hope of preventing them from being built over. The problem is identifying them; also it would be more economical to concentrate on sites at risk. At least 90% of definitive rights of way are shown on Ordnance Survey maps of the 1880s; how ancient is ancient?

David Godfrey

The Ridgeway

25th – 27th May 2013

Day 1:

Liz Adams and Michael Payton had planned a 3-day walk along 36 of the 86.5 miles of The Ridgeway, an ancient cattle drover's road stretching between Ivinghoe Beacon, in Buckinghamshire, and Overton Hill, near Marlborough in Wiltshire. They'd decided to make our route from East to West rather than the more usual West to East route, so at 09.00 on the Bank Holiday Saturday a dozen walkers met at the day's finishing point at Wendover's Cricket Club car park. Here we organised the car sharing and shuffling and then drove to the start of our walk at the bottom of Ivinghoe Beacon. It was only then the majority of us realised the full challenge of the scramble (I can call it nothing else) to the top. The Beacon rises some 230 metres and, as the ground was neither wet nor slippery, and nobody wished to walk an extra mile to the main access track, we twelve ascended - each in our own way and own time. It was a VERY stiff and incredibly steep climb but after a few stops to catch our breath we staggered – some less elegantly than others - to the summit. It was a formidable ascent but the upside was it gave a saving of 12 pairs of feet each having to walk that further mile.

Ivinghoe Beacon



Photo: Elizabeth Adams

At the top of Ivinghoe Beacon we were rewarded with the most fabulous panoramic view of The Vale of Aylesbury below. Although still chilly, the sky was clear enabling us to see probably some twenty or more miles' distance. Close by we espied the 'lion' of Whipsnade Zoo, carved out on the side of a hill.

Once we'd had a moment or two to 'prime our bellows', as Michael called it, and to savour that magnificent view, we hoisted rucksacks and set forth on our 3-day trek, everyone hopeful of more glorious views and anticipating good walking weather. No-one was disappointed. Throughout the day, as we walked the ancient trail, there was an ever constant joy of stunning vistas. Sometimes our path took us through beech woods bedecked with carpets of bluebells, speckled with the dappled sunshine, and sometimes past patches wild garlic. We were often accompanied by bird-song and enchanted by the occasional butterfly. Occasionally oncoming hikers exchanged pleasantries but mostly the day was our own.

Unused to map reading, I had photocopied the OS map and, to the best of my ability, highlighted the course of the Ridgeway, only to be advised by Liz, more than once, that I was 'off-piste', easily having confused the many Tracks and Trails! Generously, she put me right on more occasions than I'd care to share. Our merry band had walked over some very steep and demanding ascents and descents, via Tring Station, skirted Wiggington, and through the village of Hastoe with Liz constantly checking the map against the posts with stencil markers of a white acorn (the sign of a 'National Trail') and so brought us safely the, approximately, 12 miles to Wendover. What an amazingly wonderful, albeit tiring, five hours.

Coombe Hill monument



Photo: Elizabeth Adams

Day 2:

Today we were a party of nine who met in Chinnor to arrange the day's car shuffling between our end point there and the start at Wendover. We had a much more gentle introduction to the walk, beginning at Wendover's Cricket Grounds car park, on through the streets and across the railway line to once again meet open country to climb up Babcombe Hill and beyond to Coombe Hill. At the summit (almost 260 metres) we stopped at the Monument erected in 1904 in memory of men who died during the Second Boer War (11 October 1899 - 31 May 1902). According to Wikipedia, "on a clear day it can be seen from the Berkshire Downs and Salisbury Plain to the south-west and the Cotswolds to the west." Consequently, the day being clear, we were able to appreciate the incredible and breathtaking view for almost that far.

Much closer we could see the Chequers Estate, barely a few miles away. Just as we began to continue along the path, the peel of church bells rang out through the Sunday morning sunshine. Dave and I agreed there could be no more quintessentially English scene anywhere. Everyone's photo is probably held on a government database somewhere as the cameras, sited both in, along and out of the footpaths across the Chequers' Estate doubtless followed our progress. I wonder if we were filmed having our coffee break in the sun-blessed field opposite?

We continued up-hill and down-dale with a repeat of yesterday's fabulous weather and jaw dropping scenery. Later in the day a group of five teenagers, on their final task of a Gold Duke of Edinburgh Award, stopped us to confirm they were where they thought they were. Yes, they were; I could learn much from these Bright Young Things. (But I did get better at looking out for the stencilled acorn markers!)

After having skirted the town of Princes Risborough ("Fit for a Prince," as the signs told us), our path took us over the train tracks and past the golf course, a couple of small donkeys and a deer farm and on through a field of sweet smelling neon-yellow rape, its pollen marking dark coloured trousers and rucksacks with impunity.

Having taken time to ‘stand and stare”, to enjoy elevenses and lunch in the warmth of the sun, having conquered occasional stiff climbs up steep hills to enjoy long views and savour the beauty of the miles of beech tree avenues, we arrived back at Chinnor approximately 6 hours after having left.

Day 3:

Nuffield was today’s destination; (nearby is Nuffield Place, the home (from 1933 to 1963) of the late William Morris, Lord Nuffield of Morris car fame. It is now owned by The National Trust. 11 walkers met at the church to determine the shenanigans of siting which car where and then the selected drivers drove the group to Chinnor to start our last day’s hike. We knew rain was forecast for later in the day but felt sure it would not arrive until we’d completed the 12 or so miles that lay ahead. The morning was cold but clear and there was some discussion about how much to wear – Dave wearing shorts and Avril and myself sporting more than a few layers (including hats and gloves) with everyone else somewhere in between.

Oh what joy to start with a long, level stretch and no steep climb! The easy terrain meant we positively zipped along The Ridgeway, passing under the astoundingly noisy M40 before stopping for coffee. Over our previous days we had not encountered too many other travellers; today was different, with frequent noddings and occasional chats with walkers, cyclists and horse riders on the stretches of bridle path. It was during our coffee break that one conversationalist told us he was in training for the ‘24th Ridgeway Relay’ which was to be held on 16th June. This race is organised by the Marlborough Running Club for teams of ten runners to run in relay the full length of the Ridgeway over ten legs in under ten hours! (Every team must have at least two lady runners and female teams may have up to two male members.)

Our journey took us between Watlington and the bottom of Watlington Hill and so still no climb! On we breezed before stopping for a lengthy lunch where, with help from both book and Alison, Kathryn took the opportunity to identify wild flowers. A little time was spent comparing the merits of

sheep’s wool vs ‘Compeed’™ but mostly we just enjoyed basking in the sunshine.

Working off lunch?



Photo: Elizabeth Adams

Rousing from our leisure (some having discarded much apparel) we squared our shoulders to start the first real ascent of the day. It was not so very difficult but was an indication that complacency should not be our companion. Oh no, before the day was out the couple of hills ahead made this OFS member wonder why on earth she had ever embarked on the venture? I found those last hills very tough. But wow, once again was rewarded with beech and bluebells – and such fabulous views...

Without exception everyone commented on how incredibly lucky we were not only to have been blessed with three days of superb weather but also to have spent them walking in such glorious countryside. If you are up for walking a hill or three, then do flag this section of The Ridgeway on your radar for the future. If you seek views, you’d be hard pushed to find better so close to Oxford.

Each of us thanked Liz and Michael for all their hard work in organising the walk, the car parking and pooling and keeping us on track. There was talk of perhaps the next section Liz???

Hazel Hobbs

OFS Guide Books

The OFS guide books are on sale for £2 at The Last Bookshop, 7 New Inn Hall Street, Oxford (opposite Argos).

The Isle of Wight

12th – 16th April 2013

Freshwater Bay: only imagine - the sun-sparkled waters in the cove, the rolling Chalk Downs, the views, the breeze from the sea, a pre-prandial drink in the gardens as the sun goes down...

Only, it didn't turn out quite like that. Sou'westers (you know, those big, yellow, waterproof hats that lifeboat men wear) were designed to withstand the worst that the weather could throw at any coast open to the winds from that quarter. And we were in that quarter! Add to that a cloud, engulfing even the lowest parts of Tennyson Down, whipping wind and rain into every pore, and we offered a silent prayer of thanks that our leader confidently led a safe route back to the refuge of the drying room and hot water. That was Saturday. Supper-time talk was full of speculation about the teenager who had fallen down the cliff, the helicopter that had to abandon the search because there was no visibility. 'He was wearing only a t-shirt and jeans.' 'He'd escaped from the young offenders' prison.' 'He was drowned.' 'He was caught.' But we heard nothing of it on the news.

Sunday, by comparison, was a breeze; a very stiff breeze. Could they really be having a barbecue at home in Oxfordshire while we huddled in the lee of an abandoned bothy and admired the view from the island's highest point? Clear, clear air to refresh and renew us, and inclines to challenge our legs and fortitude. We reached the second highest point on the island, and almost the highest... but our leader changed course. I forget why. But I did feel well-exercised and invigorated. And virtuous!

Monday was lovely: the walking well paced and full of variety, a group ambiance that confirmed the pleasure I derive from the Society's activities, and that comfortable weariness at the end of the day which is best expressed by *mens sana in corpora sano*.

Walk leaders are so vital to the enjoyment of the day. Some of us walk purely for exercise, or for time to 'think'; some of us for the scenery and points of interest. Others just love the ambiance of

good companionship, of spotting unusual flora and fauna; and most of us walk for a combination of all of these. For the first hour the group settles into itself; the good leader adapts the pace, picks up on the mood and interests of the group and allows just the right amount of information and drink stops to establish an harmonious rhythm to the walk. When leaders seek to have a personality cult or to be over-controlling it can lead to unedifying confrontations. This was my first experience of a walker clashing with an HF leader and it was most uncomfortable. I understand that the leader in question is retiring.

And then there is the pleasure of a well-run country house hotel, staffed by happy and willing personnel ever on hand to meet, promptly and smilingly, every request... no leadership from the top here; but the younger members of staff were lovely, and obviously self-motivated.

Oh, do not think we had nothing but negative views! OFS people, I have come to realise, are more than able to focus on what is good. Saturday apart, the walking was memorable. (And actually, that cloud-soaked freezing day will not readily be forgotten.) All my previous holidays with OFS have been wonderful: I love the choice of walks, the good companionship, the excellent food and accommodation, the lightweight entertainment in the evenings, the affability the activity engenders.

I am really looking forward to the next group break, at Selworthy, in October.

[Lesley Fraser](#)

Your Paths Need You!

Members of the Society who also belong to The Ramblers will be aware that the Oxfordshire Area of The Ramblers is promoting the establishment of [Volunteer Parish Path Wardens](#) throughout the county. Thirty parishes that lie in the Cotswold Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty have such wardens under the Cotswold Wardens. Twenty-seven parishes in the Chiltern Hills have wardens under the aegis of the Chiltern Society. Over the last 4 months seventy-five volunteers have come forward to look after the path network in their parishes. This still leaves 190 parishes in the county that do not yet have a warden.

The main role of a path warden is to monitor the paths in a parish on a regular basis, and report major problems to the County Council's Countryside Access Service. He/she may also do light trimming of vegetation that is overgrowing the path, particularly at gates, stiles and bridges, thus keeping the paths in the parish easy to walk along.

It is noteworthy that the latest draft of the revised and updated Oxfordshire Rights of Way Plan welcomes and endorses the development of Parish Path Wardens, recognising the contribution that they can make to the maintenance of the quality of the path infrastructure and network.

If any Society member would like further details on volunteering to become a Parish Path Warden please contact me on jmh.parke@btinternet.com.

Jim Parke

The Jack Ibbott Memorial Walk

29th June 2013

The group with Sir Hugo Brunner



Photo: Jim Parke

Jack Ibbott had been a long standing member of the Society for some 43 years. During this time he held most positions culminating as President. Sadly Jack died at the end of 2012, so this walk was organised to honour his memory.

The choice of walk was made easy by the fact that Jack, together with his wife Margaret, had compiled a booklet of 10 walks titled "*Oxfordshire Rambles*". A walk from Dorchester Abbey seemed ideal; if the start time was appropriate we would finish in time to enjoy an afternoon tea in the Abbey Tea Rooms; a wonderful service run by volunteers who bake the most mouth-watering cakes. Try gooseberry sponge cake; it's "to die for".

The Abbey Tea Room has a sliding charge for cups of tea: 1st cup 60p, 2nd cup 50p, and 3rd cup 40p. How much tea must one drink before they start paying you? Could it be 8 cups?

A surprise bonus was that our new President elect, Sir Hugo Brunner, met us at the start. Our Chairman introduced him to the 25 walkers present.

Jack's son, Michael, joined us. It was delightful to hear him reminisce about the walk and how he had done it many times before, with his parents, when he was a lad.

The route took us down to the River Thames to cross over the footbridge where the International Poosticks championship takes place every year. Then it was a steady climb up to Wittenham Clumps for spectacular views. Half-way to the top, Didcot Power Station came into view – looking as forlorn as a group of abandoned chess pieces; not even a wisp of ghostly steam came from the cooling towers.

From Round Hill, the highest point in the area, there are panoramic vistas over the surrounding countryside. A Toposcope, or Topograph, on a plinth gives direction and distance to visible features.

Whittenham Clumps, Poet's Stone



Photo: Mike Ibbott

After a brief pause, to regulate breathing and slow the heart rate, it was on and over the site of an Iron Age Fort. From the high ground it was down through Little Wittenham Wood, over the river and back to the start, this time following the Thames downstream until we met the river Thame.

Some walkers went straight to the tea rooms while others did the extra mile through the village of Overy to cross the Thame in front of the old water-mill.

This was a most enjoyable walk that some of us had done on previous occasions with Jack and Margaret.

John Eyre

Did you know?

The Oxford Fieldpaths Society was founded in 1926 by a group of notable City Fathers and University Fellows who were greatly concerned about the spread of Oxford City into the countryside and the potential loss of footpaths, and other open spaces, to the encroaching urbanisation.

Moreover some farmers were closing paths, many of which dated from mediaeval times. Its original name was '*The Oxford and District Footpaths, Bridlepaths and Commons Preservation Society*' though it is now known as the Oxford Fieldpaths Society and is, probably, one of the oldest of this type in the country.

Society members regularly walked the paths, surveying and recording them on maps; and objecting vigorously and successfully to threatened path closures. After the War the Society, during the late 40s and early 50s engaged in the task of ensuring that footpaths and bridleways were registered as Public Rights of Way and recorded on the Oxfordshire County Council's Definitive Map and Statement. d'Arcy Dalton, the then Secretary of the Society, attended to give evidence to, and then winning, dozens of enquiries where the establishment of a Public Right of Way was being contested by the landowner over whose land the path ran.

The OFS continues to carry on the work of the original founders of the Society. It is one of the bodies that the County Countryside Access Service must consult whenever there are any proposed changes to the path infrastructure, be it closure, diversion, change of status, or addition to the network. It is also involved at an early stage in the planning of major urban expansion schemes in towns such as Didcot and Bicester in order to safeguard existing Public Rights of Way. Committee members David Godfrey and Nick Moon carry on this very important work; thus fulfilling the principal aims of the Society.

Jim Parke

Skittles Evening

October 2012

different venue and time of year and back by popular demand: the Skittles night. For more than the last ten years this popular evening had been organised by Pat and Lew Gammon, and the trophy had been won on several occasions by Brian Colley. The closure of the skittles alleys at Sturdy's Castle and Tackley required finding a new venue, and the Red Lion at Islip filled the bill admirably. For the first time in many years Brian Colley was unable to come, so it opened up the possibility that another OFS member might steer his or her team to victory and be guardian of the trophy for a year!

The opening rounds, ably led by Sue Crisp, John Eyre, Michael Payton and Margaret Jones, were close; only 9 points between the top and bottom team, and completed before a plentiful supper. With renewed strength and recharged glasses we had the play-off for third and fourth places, which was a dead heat, before a tense final; and Sue Crisp's team came out convincing winners.

Oops! Did you drop it? Sue Crisp's team



Photo: Elizabeth Adams

Our thanks go to Michael Payton who found the pub and alley, and to Margaret Jones who looked after the administrative details, and to all the staff at the Red Lion who made us welcome. A good night was had by all, and this year's skittles night, at the same venue, is fully booked.

Elizabeth Adams