



# OXFORD FIELDPATHS SOCIETY

## NEWSLETTER

Issue 20: September 2014

### From the Chairman

#### Progress on Parish Path Wardens

An initiative in which the Society members have played an important role has been our contribution to the development of the Parish Path Warden network throughout the county, working in partnership with the Oxfordshire Area Ramblers and the Countryside Access Team of Oxfordshire County Council.

Following a survey, we noted that three years ago only a handful of the County's parishes, located in the Vale of White Horse and Cherwell District areas, reported the equivalent of a PPW in place. On the other hand some parishes in the Chilterns Hills in South Oxfordshire and those in the Cotswold Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty in West Oxfordshire have benefitted from volunteers working in the Chiltern Society and as Cotswold Wardens.

Seeking to address this state of affairs we sent out letters and posters, asking Parish Clerks to pin these on their Parish Notice boards, inviting people to volunteer to become a PPW. OFS and Rambler Newsletters also asked for volunteers to come forward as PPW volunteers.

The response was encouraging so, in May 2013, we organised a pilot Day Workshop to take place at Wroxton Village Hall, near Banbury. Building on the success of our first workshop, similar Workshop Days were held at Horspath, on October 5th, Eynsham, on October 26th, and Tiddington, in March of this year. We devoted the morning session to short talks on how to access the County's PRow Definitive Map and Statement, and how to use the online Interactive Map. Then came a talk from a County Field Officer about his/her responsibilities, and a discussion of the PPW Guidelines.

The afternoon consisted of a practical session - a short circular walk led by the County Field Officer to demonstrate some of the typical footpath issues. Our four workshops have attracted more than 50 participants. The next workshop which is scheduled for Saturday September 20th takes place at East Hanney Village Memorial Hall.

The Countryside Access Team has produced large scale (1:10,000) maps for every single parish, showing the number and the location of every Public Right of Way. This is a valuable reference aid for our PPWs, and maps have now been distributed to every PPW in the county. The format of the list of unresolved footpath problems for each parish has been modified to make it more user-friendly. We have also amended the Guidelines so that PPWs have a clear understanding of how to go about reporting and checking problems.

Recently we received a request from the Countryside Access Team to survey a number of 'Promoted Walks' throughout the county, details of which can be found on the Team's website. A similar exercise has been undertaken on the Oxfordshire Way, which stretches for 67 miles from the west of the County, traversing some 36 parishes, before reaching Henley-on-Thames in the south. The PPWs of those parishes through which the Oxfordshire Way runs have been asked to check the accuracy of the description and to identify any problems found on the route. This is a very similar task to the survey of the d'Arcy Dalton Way, which Society members undertook some time ago, and to the surveys the Society undertakes of various sections of the Oxford Green Belt Way on behalf of the CPRE.

About 75% of Oxfordshire's parishes now have a PPW in place, and most of the parishes without PPWs are located on the fringes of the County.

If any OFS member wishes to have more information about the role of the PPW please contact me. [jmh.parke@btinternet.com](mailto:jmh.parke@btinternet.com)

#### OFS Donate-a-Gate Scheme

At the Committee Meeting on January 22nd, 2014 it was agreed in principal to install plaques on gates which had been donated by the Society. They will be white with dark green printing. The OFS logo will appear on the left of the plaque with the text:

THIS GATE WAS FUNDED BY THE  
OXFORD FIELDPATHS SOCIETY

## A Letter to You All From John and Sue Ashbridge

By the time you read this, Sue and I will have left Oxfordshire and will have moved to the village of Dersingham in West Norfolk, about mid-way between King's Lynn and Hunstanton.

During our time with the OFS we have made many friends and will miss your company and walking the many footpaths, bridleways and lanes around the county.

Having led many walks during my ten years of membership, I hope that those of you that joined me enjoyed walking them as much as I did planning them.

We have some special memories: particularly of our honeymoon, six years ago, when we joined the residential group which stayed at the holiday park in Croyde Bay. It is lovely to remember the private reception which was laid on for us by the rest of the group.

The area around our new home has plenty of lovely country walks. (Sandringham Estate is only just down the road – perhaps we might get an invite to tea!!). There are two walking groups nearby so we should soon have our walking boots on again to explore the local countryside.

We send our apologies to those of you that we have missed recently and so were unable to say goodbye to (the move having come about more quickly than we thought) but we hope to keep in touch to let you know how we are getting on.

May we wish the OFS many more years ahead in protecting and improving the countryside of Oxfordshire for the future generations to come.

Best Wishes to you all from John & Sue Ashbridge.

P.S. Keep Walking!!

### Diversions, etc

Strange things have been happening at LITTLE ROLLRIGHT on the d'Arcy Dalton Way. The path has been excavated leaving a cliff-face to climb, and the spoil has been placed where it obstructs the view both from the definitive line eastwards across country and from the proposed diversion across to the village. The definitive line has a fine view over the village (photo) which we wish to keep.

### Little Rollright



Photo: David Godfrey

The other path through the village is also the subject of a diversion, this time round the houses; the problem is that a drafting error on the 1999 Definitive Map leaves a gap at this point between the path and the public road.

The path at Uffington which has been closed by Network Rail looks like being sorted out in the not too distant future, as a proposal for a footbridge has been received.

The Vale Council has failed to produce a diversion order on UFFINGTON FP9, in a parish where at least two other paths are obstructed by housing, and we are still waiting for a diversion order at KENNINGTON where the bridge has already been built.

Proposals for minor diversions have been received at Chilling Place, Piddington, at Hobbshole Farm, Sandford St. Martin (since confirmed), and at the deer farm in Letcombe Bassett (also confirmed).

There is a planning application to build over most of THAME FP13, which is a dead end, and to extinguish this section; however, it seems that an extension to the path could be claimed.

It is likely that no order will be made for diversion at Sydenham Grange, where the Parish Council and the Open Spaces Society have reached impasse.

There is still no movement on the Chippinghurst case. The claimed path from Wolvercote to Pixey Mead, part of Charles I's escape route in 1644, is now completely blocked at the Godstow Road end with a barbed wire fortification.

## Other Matters

Cherwell District's attempt to find its "ancient ways" revealed little that I could identify for certain. However Mill Lane, Kirtlington certainly goes back to the 12th century and the path from Islip to Wendlebury goes back to well before 1791. Elsewhere, Hardwell Lane goes back before 903 and there are several other paths which can be identified from Anglo-Saxon documents.

Some roads are also older than they look; the "rams' ford" of 958, now known as Tittenford Bridge, is where the road leading west from Rousham Gap crosses the Dorn. A name ending in -ford denotes a road in use, but there are often problems identifying which one; Stanford-in-the-Vale may refer to a ford on the A417 or the causeway on the path to Goosey; and Shifford may refer to a ford across the Thames where there was a stone bridge in 958. There is now no trace of this road.

David Godfrey

## OFS Walking Holidays Over the Years

Since the millennium there have been many walking holidays arranged by OFS members to wonderful areas of the country that have provided varied and different experiences from our home county of Oxfordshire.

Walking along coastal paths and cliffs were involved on many of the holidays. There were three holidays to the Isle of Wight, two based at Sandown and another based at Freshwater. Memorable would be the steady climb up Tennyson Down, twice in wind and rain and once in glorious weather with views to the Needles and Solent.

Other holidays have included walking the North Norfolk Coast Path along flatter salt marshes and glorious sandy beaches, with the opportunity to see some wonderful wildlife, like the seals off Blakeney Point and delicate avocets in the coastal lagoons.

There have been three holidays to the north Devon/Somerset coast – Croyde Bay, Holford and Selworthy, providing the chance to walk along sometimes dramatic, challenging cliff paths with waves crashing below, as well as walking in the wooded hills of Exmoor.

We have also been to Hope Cove in South Devon, Cooden Beach in East Sussex, Cardigan Bay in South Wales and St. Ives in Cornwall.

Areas that cover the hilly uplands of the country have been popular, some holidays being based in very scenic countryside within national parks. One group walked the very undulating Mortimer Trail on the Welsh borders and Shropshire. Other Shropshire holidays have involved stiff climbing up the Stiperstones, the Long Mynd and Wenlock Edge, two holidays being based at the rather old fashioned Long Mynd Hotel in Church Stretton. The Peak District, the Brecon Beacons and Lancashire Hills have provided groups with walks up and along hilly ridges with moorland, stone walls and rougher terrain all around, sometimes having only sheep for company. Pendle Hill (Burnley), the Roaches (Gradbach) and hills and dales of the White Peak (Alsop-en-leDale) have all been conquered by the hardy among us. During the Foot and Mouth epidemic we even managed a trip to Abergavenny with restricted walking, staying in an old school - and that was basic, to say the least!

Most of the earlier trips were arranged with our own leaders taking up the challenge to organise a programme of varied and challenging walks. These would cater for two at least, if not three levels of ability, with walks ranging from 5 miles, to 7-8 miles and the more difficult 10-12 miles. John Eyre did a splendid job here coordinating the whole programme. Many thanks are due to Gretchen Seiffert, Gwyneth Tyson, Liz Adams, Michael Payton and Tilley Smith for masterminding these very enjoyable holidays.

In more recent years OFS walking holidays have been booked with HF Holidays who provide full board accommodation in their lovely country houses and experienced leaders who do all the background work to organise the walks. It is a walking experience for everybody so no OFS member is left carrying the burden of responsibility. Alison Broadbridge and I have been the organisers recently and hopefully there will be more residential trips to come.

**But we do need more members to come forward, to take the plunge, and offer a trip of their own.**

Sue Crisp

## 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.

## Linear Walking on Long Weekends

### The Ridgeway Completed May 2014

Last late May bank holiday weekend a group of members started to walk the Ridgeway from north to south, beginning at Ivinghoe Beacon in wet conditions and finishing at Nuffield. In order to complete the entire length to Avebury this late May holiday, two further sections were walked in the autumn and spring: Nuffield to Goring and Streatley to Courthill.

Walking along the Thames from South Stoke we were soaked and arrived in Goring looking like drowned rats. There seems to be an association with rain and walking linear routes over three days as we have experienced similar conditions on the d'Arcy Dalton and the Oxfordshire Ways in previous years. Is it a coincidence, or are we just unlucky?

This year the three day project was to arrive at Avebury and started in similarly unprepossessing conditions. The car journey to the day's finishing point, Fox Hill, was along country lanes awash with water draining from the escarpment and heavy grey skies above us.

By the time we got back to the start point the skies seemed to be lighter, or was it hope over reality? We set off in wet weather gear and a light drizzle. At lunchtime, sitting on the castle at Uffington, waterproof jackets were off, visibility improved, and the wonderful countryside was revealed. The elegant shape of the White Horse was seen from a different angle as we set off again.

It was interesting to see the different wild flowers which lined our route – the different vetches which are specific to chalky ground; very unlike the species seen in the clay valley of the Thames. At the end of the day we were invited to the home of June and John Henville for a very welcome, reviving, afternoon tea: delicious cakes, scones with homemade jam and copious quantities of tea and coffee.

Day two dawned with sunshine and fair weather. We started from Fox Hill and began with a slog along roads and over the M4 before we headed onto footpaths, a climb to Liddington Hill, past Liddington Castle, the remains of an Iron Age fort, and along a ridge with beautiful views on either side. Then the gentle descent to Ogbourne St George, the climb up onto Smeathes Ridge, and arrival at Barbury Castle. There was plenty of time to admire the views.

The final leg, Barbury Castle to Avebury on the Marlborough Downs, was deliberately kept short, so we should have time to wander around Avebury Circle and village, and so that those who had to work on Tuesday be not too exhausted.

We started walking through the huge Iron Age fort of Barbury Castle, the double ditches indicating how important a site it was. The views in all directions were extensive, making it very clear why this spot has been chosen to defend.

After the drop down from the castle, there was a slow ascent to Hackpen Hill and then a long gentle descent alongside fields to reach close to the official end of the Ridgeway – where it reaches the A4.

Instead we turned away from the Ridgeway and onto footpaths to take us into Avebury. Lunch was eaten sitting on the sides of an Iron Age barrow. Evidence of our earlier ancestors' lives was all around us on the Ridgeway: the Iron Age hill forts, the barrows from the Bronze Age and the Neolithic henge at Avebury itself.

We reached Avebury by mid-afternoon, passing by the stone circles on our way into the village, which was very busy with tourists. As the rain started again we abandoned walking round the circles of stones and had a rather soggy cup of tea in the National Trust cafe, before returning to Barbury Castle.

### The five finishers



Photo: Kazie Wischnewski

Despite the drizzle we enjoyed a glass of champagne, courtesy of Kazie and Martin Wischnewski, to celebrate reaching the end of the Ridgeway, and to congratulate the 'famous five' who had walked the entire length of 86 miles (less the two miles of road walking between Goring and Streatley).

We all returned home feeling tired, but very happy to have achieved our goal, I went home thinking which long distance trail we could walk next year which is conveniently near to Oxford . Thanks to all of you who took part in one or more or all the sections; it was a great way to see the countryside further afield from the usual OFS walks.

Liz Adams

## OFS Visit to St Albans

7th September 2013

The last time I visited St Albans it was as a member of a group of seven year olds on a school trip. It occurred to me then that there was more to do than throw clumps of goose grass onto a friends' T shirt, and that I should have to make time to get back. One of the great bonuses of belonging to OFS is the opportunity to visit the places one always means to go back to, in the company of friends. And so we set off to St Albans for a day of grown-up fun, with a mature sense of appreciation (and perhaps even a sense of patriotic curiosity) for a site whose long history commemorates England's first Christian Martyr.

We trundled off in a distinctly period bus, which, despite its retro appearance, ate up the miles to Sandridge. Here, after manoeuvrings in the cramped confines of the village hall conveniences, we started our walk.

For those who tramp the historic and traditional landscapes of Oxfordshire, it was a reminder of how landscapes (however bucolic) are created by human activity. This was a countryside shaped by the needs of a suburban population, and demonstrated how valued is open space in an urban context.

It's a source of recreation: we walked through the well nibbled fields of a riding centre and caught a glimpse of the future Woodland Trust plantations at their newly acquired Heartwood Forest.

There's space to experiment, to try new varieties and fashions in food. Farmed emus skewered us elegantly with their fierce gaze. Immensely scrumpable varieties of pick your own soft fruit were a tasty alternative to hedgerow blackberries (you know who you are!)

There were roads to cross – and very polite drivers who were startled enough by the flock of walkers to stop. The day was a mix of golden sun and grey clouds which, along with crab

apples in the hedgerows was a hint that summer was at its tipping point. We should be grateful for such days; and we were. Relieved too; it rained short and sharply enough to justify having packed the rain gear but not to spoil the day.

Finally, we enjoyed a pilgrim's eye view of the Abbey and Cathedral, on the skyline, as we made our way towards that great pilgrim tradition - the communal meal. Lunch was at the Blue Boar, comfortable and roomy enough for us all, and our clobber, and for Liz to field plates until we were united with our orders.

The afternoon was for exploring. There was much to see and do to satisfy any interest – from well stocked plant stalls in the market and convivial refreshment in the delectable teashops, to the Abbey and the fascination of architectural development from the Saxon period to the present day.

Inside the Abbey a practising choir added an ethereal top note to the hush and the murmurs of the guides. Outside; Roman walls, Roman mosaics and hidden archaeology blended with the shrieks and chatter of families enjoying Verulamium Park.

Somehow, all the groups came together at five o'clock for the journey home, thoroughly briefed with the summer activities of much travelled OFS members, and perhaps slightly more in touch with our Anglo Saxon roots. Thank you again Liz and Michael for doing so much to ensure a successful day, and an imaginative choice of venue. (And there wasn't a scrap of goose grass on my clothes when I got home).

Helen Walker

## How to Report Problems

A collapsing stile, a step designed to accommodate giant legs, way marks that have wandered away, wooden bridges that have succumbed to time and the weather, barbed wire blocking the pathway... this is what you do:

Go to the Countryside Service's website at <http://www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/cms/public-site/countryside>. Click on 'Access Maps' and then select the 'Countryside Access Map'.

Find and click on the location of the problem. At the bottom of the map, the path you have selected will be specified and a link to allow you to report the problem will appear. Clicking the link will open a small form to fill in.

## Bowling Evening

The Red Lion, Islip, 18<sup>th</sup> October 2013

Once again Michael Payton organised an evening of laughter and the chance to reveal the hidden talents and sporting prowess of some of our members; and their competitiveness! it was a close run thing - but somebody won and the trophy was duly presented to the winning team captain, to disappear for another year.

Michael planned an Aunt Sally evening for this year but unfortunately the pub closed a week before the event was due to happen.

## OFS at the Wychwood Forest Country Fair

September 2013



Photo: Jim Parke

There is something irresistible about a beautiful day towards the end of summer; the September 2013 Wychwood Forest Fair took place on one of those lovely days. The brass band was playing, the tea and beer tents were busy and the Morris Dancers in white costumes and Border Country black costumes with sooty faces were dancing.

The range of artisan stands at the Fair was impressive from creative wood turners to pretty handmade cards decorated with a 500 years old English technique of paper curling. With the aim to publicise OFS Jim Parke, Sue Crisp and Margaret Jones staffed a stand, gave out information and talked themselves almost hoarse as the good weather had brought many people to the Fair.



Photo: Jim Parke

Despite a lot of interest in the Society the OFS Committee were a little disappointed in the number of new members attracted to join us.

Margaret Jones

## Annual Outing

No annual outing this year?

Could it be that there is a lack of interest? No.

Maybe it's too expensive? You could only do it for less if you walked there; and then there's the cost of boot leather and refreshment en route...

The organisers couldn't think of somewhere interesting to go? Oh, come on!

"Eavesdroppers ne'er hear well of themselves," I learned as a child. So was I to own up when I heard the exasperated organisers grumbling?

- Did I make a firm commitment, in good time?
- Did I make an up-front payment?
- Did I drop out at the last minute?
- Did I find someone to replace me, if I did have to drop out, so that costs were covered?

This is just one of the social events that are the 'icing on the cake' for membership the OFS. It would be a sad thing if the difficulties mentioned led to their not taking place.

## OFS Goes to HF St Ives

26<sup>th</sup> – 30<sup>th</sup> April 2014

Freshly baked scones, warm from the oven, bowls of thick Cornish clotted cream and strawberry jam. What better start could there be to our walking holiday in St Ives?

On Saturday 26th April, sixteen OFS members gathered in the large lounge of Chy Morvah, the H.F. house in St Ives, and enjoyed this very sociable cream tea with our walks leaders, fellow walkers, and another group on a Guided Discovery Tour.

Pleasantly replete, only a few keen people braved the rain showers and the very steep hills to explore the town. The rest of us were lazy and settled for unpacking and generally being idle until meeting again for a walks briefing followed by supper.

The long-term weather forecast had been pretty grim before leaving Oxfordshire and Sunday began as feared with most people setting off in full waterproofs. All three walks took circular routes from the house ranging from 5 to 10 miles with each finishing along the SW Coastal Path to Carbis Bay and St Ives.

The harder walk scaled Trencrom Hill with its Iron Age hill fort, just when the heavens opened. However, that deluge seemed to assuage the 'weather gods' because then the sky cleared and we were soon shedding layers, as we walked back to Chy Morvah under a beautiful blue sky, whilst enjoying the stunning sight of St Ives in the sunshine.

The weather on our second walking day was glorious. The focus of the walks was the heritage sites of Cornwall's NW coast. A coach dropped off each group at their starting points and we enjoyed walking through the impressive industrial artefacts as we made our way to Land's End. The easier walk visited the mining village of St Just and walked through Cot Valley to Sennen Cove before joining the Coastal Path.

The medium and harder walks followed the coastal path via Cape Cornwall, once thought to be the most westerly point in England, and Ballowall Barrow, a remarkable Bronze Age burial chamber. Our destination, Land's End, is sadly spoilt by tacky development and for those of us who didn't have time to stop in Sennen Cove, the final blow in this embodiment of commercialisation, was that the ice cream shop was closed. Luckily the views out to sea remain dramatic.

Our final walking day was along the Coastal Path on the southern coast, which was undulating and beautiful but less rugged than the previous day. Again we passed well-

preserved mine buildings, including Wheal Prosper, made famous in the Poldark series, and, as we headed towards our destination at Marizion, could enjoy the glorious sight of St Michael's Mount. People on the easier walk were lucky enough to squeeze in a visit but the other groups were satisfied just to have time to buy a Cornish ice cream. It was delicious.

Those of you who have enjoyed HF holidays in the UK will know that the walks leaders usually provide some kind of activity each evening for guests to join, if they wish. On our first evening Chrissie, the leader of the Discovery Tour, treated us to a short power-point talk about some of the places her group would be visiting during the week. Combining history, landscape features, and stories of the area, it was fascinating and very informative. It even enabled us to spot 'General de Gaulle' basking in the sea near Cape Cornwall.

Other evening activities included simple but fun quizzes, another fascinating talk by a local resident who writes travel guides and a final evening of poems, magic and sundry offerings by both members and leaders with a few country dances thrown into the mix; just in case we had any surplus energy left after all those miles.

Of course, no OFS walking holiday would be complete without a plumbing challenge and true-to-form as a group of us made our way up the stairs at bedtime on our first night, we encountered Lesley in full flight, about to descend upon management asserting exasperatedly that there was no hot water!

Unfortunately morning confirmed everyone's fears – apart from the lucky few on an independent system; there were cold showers for the very brave and 'a lick and a promise' for the rest of us. However, despite it being a Sunday, the problem was rectified by the time we returned from our day's walk and I imagine everyone wallowed in their hot showers that evening.

So to sum-up, we had a wonderful holiday combining good walking and good company at a lovely time of year, in a beautiful corner of our amazing island. Thank you very much to Allison and Sue for making it all possible.

[June Henville](#)

## Membership

Gwyneth reports that 2 new members were counted in during the last year and 3 counted out. The committee would like to remind members that membership is on an individual basis and there is no 'joint' membership for family and friends. This is particularly important when it comes to insurance cover; there are so many 'get-outs' which are resorted to by insurance companies that organisers of outings, walks and trips etc. have to be petty-foggingly scrupulous about including only paid-up members.

We were sorry to lose Kathryn Hjerridd, who walked with us last year, on her move to Australia. She was often a lively companion on walks, particularly on the three day event, in Spring 2013, when we walked the from the eastern end of the Ridgeway.

## Money Matters

Where does all the money go? Adam and Mike have done an excellent job, taking over the tasks from John Eyre, as you will have gathered if you attended the AGM. A large part of the fees goes towards our participation in preserving the 2,625 miles of footpaths around the county. The Donate a Gate scheme has received our support as has the Chiltern Society and then there is our affiliation to The Ramblers (for insurance purposes –wouldn't you guess! - not membership) and, of course, all the bits and pieces associated with keeping you informed, like this newsletter, or the programme...

## Walks Leaders Needed!

If you think that this winter's walks programme has fewer walks than usual, you are right. Sadly some leaders have indicated that they are unable to lead – this may be temporary for some, but others have decided to hang up their leaders' boots. There is, therefore, an urgent need to recruit new leaders. Do you have a walk close to home that you enjoy? Then why not offer to lead it and share your enjoyment with the rest of OFS.

All members of the committee and experienced leaders are more than willing to help: from the planning (using books or directly from the OS map), through to checking the route and being there to offer support on the day. A pack of guidance notes is available giving useful information for each stage.

When I took over the position of walks co-ordinator, Sue Crisp, who had masterminded the programme for the last ten years, gave me a list of leaders with forty six names on it. For this winter programme I have received walks from twenty five, some of these are two people who will jointly lead the walk. It is apparent that unless more members' names are added to the list, the numbers of walks which will appear in the programme will progressively decline. So please seriously consider making a greater contribution to the Society and become a leader.

## Liz Adams

Don't be fazed; it isn't that difficult. Maybe you want to try a route; maybe you already have a favourite area; maybe you want to explore an area that hasn't been in the programme recently. Go to OCC website, as noted above and look at the map. Compare it with the paper version. Go to your local library, or treat yourself to a visit to Blackwell's; there are many excellent walking guides designed to enthuse, not intimidate. Choose something which interests YOU.

Try it out. Check you are comfortable with all the 'Elf and Safey' diktats which look intimidating but are really common sense (copy from Liz Adams). Send a proposal to Liz Adams (Walks Organiser) and then recce your walk a few days before the event to check that nothing untoward has happened. Pull your sunshine string on the eve of the walk and then enjoy yourself. A lot of people will be ready to thank you for your efforts, which is always nice, and you may be surprised to find how rewarding the whole exercise is in providing pleasure for fellow walkers. Promise!

<http://www.ofs.org.uk/walking/leaderAdvice/> has advice on starting as a walks leader.