



OXFORD FIELDPATHS SOCIETY

NEWSLETTER

Issue 18: September 2012

From the Chairman

Keeping the footpaths open and accessible to all was one of the tenets of the Society in 1926 and in 2012 this is still an important part of the Society's activities. After two dry winters, despite the snow, hosepipe bans were introduced in April and then the rain finally came. Streams and rivers filled up and fields became quagmires made worse in those with cattle. Hedgerows suddenly were lush with greenery and some walks felt as though one was trekking through unexplored jungle! However these inconveniences have not deterred OFS members, though cries of 'I need a dock leaf' have been heard as the nettles have been particularly vicious. Occasional detours have had to be made around flooded paths and fallen trees but we have kept walking.

Raising the cost of the subscription two years ago has allowed the Society to cover its expenditure without having to recourse to the use of accumulated funds. It has enabled the Society to fund the purchase of gates to replace stiles and we have made a contribution to the Cotswold Wardens for their policy of making walks stile free and have agreed to make a contribution to the County Council to replace deficient stiles, both on a circular walk leading from the d'Arcy Dalton Way as well as the Oxfordshire Way. The latter has a section between Waterperry and Pyrton with 38 stiles, some of which are in very poor condition. Although it was hoped that members of the Society might, in future, be able to install gates, at preliminary teaching sessions with the County Council Field Officers to install way mark posts, the volunteers found the work hard physical labour. So it would currently seem that the best way OFS can make a contribution to improving the rights of way is to survey, report deficiencies of paths, stiles and bridges and donate money to the County Council for they, or their contractors, to install gates and posts.

The Newsletter provides an opportunity to describe some of the activities of the Society with accompanying pictures and demonstrates how vibrant the Society is.

Health and Safety – an OFS Insurance Issue

Our insurer, Perkins Slade, who provide third party liability cover for OFS, have made some new conditions regarding the renewal of our policy. It is required that we appoint a health and safety officer to oversee all aspects of our walking programme. I have agreed to take on this role on a temporary basis as I am the current walks organiser.

What does this mean for us as a walking group? Well, we all need to be more safety conscious and responsible particularly when walking along, and crossing roads.

At a recent meeting walk leaders were asked to state at the beginning of each walk, (if roads were part of the route), that members should always walk in single file facing on-coming traffic, except round blind bends. This is a very important issue and members are asked to take note of this requirement. When approaching a road which involves crossing over, walks leaders will give instructions to help small groups cross safely to the other side.

The committee will be considering at their meetings the use of florescent hi-vis jackets for both the leader and the back marker. These might be possibly be loaned to leaders. Watch this space.

Sue Crisp

What do you remember?

Although I have been on hundreds of walks, walked thousands of miles and seen wondrous sights, distant horizons and sweeping panoramas the moments I recall most vividly seem to include rain. Perhaps this tells you more about me. So here are a few at random.

When walking the second leg of the d'Arcy Dalton Way from south to north with a small group we started in the rain which continued all day; by late morning we were all rather dejected and called in to the pub at Radcot Bridge. As we dripped onto the floor our thoughts were for a hot drink. Forgoing alcohol we settled for tea and coffee. The landlord then produced warm chocolate muffins to our delight. We set off into the rain with renewed vigour.

A similar event occurred at the Blacks Head in Stonesfield. The landlord informed us "that they did not do food". At this moment the landlord's wife appeared, took a look at us bedraggled walkers and said she could cook some sausages and serve them in long rolls. We warmed to the idea and with full bellies set off into the rain.

The event I remember most vividly so far is unique to me. A party of three friends went on a long weekend to Snowdonia with a plan to walk up Snowdon. The weather was poor with low cloud but mainly dry, so we did some lowland walks.

On the last day it was raining and the clouds were very low. We decided to head for the summit knowing that if we got soaked we had a spare change of dry clothing. To minimise climbing we started from the top of the Llanberis Pass. Going was as expected through continuous rain. When we were about 500 feet from the summit we came out of the cloud into bright, hot sunshine.

When we reached the top the ground was sprinkled with sunbathers. We joined the throng and almost dried out. We were reluctant to leave knowing that we would have to descend through the cloud and rain to our car. It was magical above the cloud; we could see other peaks protruding and watch the constant ebb and flow of the cloud in the cwms.

I have seen such a scene many times on television but only been present once. Happy days.

John Eyre

D'Arcy Dalton Way Circular Walks Survey 2012

Last year OFS volunteers undertook a systematic survey of the 66 mile long d'Arcy Dalton Way. The Way commemorates one of the most notable defender of Oxfordshire's rights of way, Colonel W. P. d'Arcy Dalton (1893-1981). D'Arcy, as he was known to his friends, was a founder member of the OFS in 1926 and its first assistant secretary. For over 50 years he served the Society, first as honorary secretary, then as an Executive Committee member and Chairman and finally as President. His name is now to be found on the specially-made signs on the finger posts that direct the walker along the Way.

It was created in 1986 to mark the OFS's Diamond Jubilee in 1986 and devised by Nick Moon with the aim of linking together a number of footpaths running generally north-south across the County in order to provide a continuous long-distance trail.

Volunteers surveyed the Way in 12 stages and recorded on survey sheets, stiles, footbridges, way marks and finger posts which were considered, as a result of the survey, to be in need of repair or replacement. This information, consisting of survey reports and a detailed map on each stage, was given to Dan Weeks, the Field Officer for West Oxfordshire in the County Council's Countryside Department.

Recording information on the proforma



Photo: Jim Parke

This year the Volunteers are surveying 10 Circular Walks which incorporate sections of the d'Arcy Dalton Way. They stretch from the village of Claydon in the north of the county to White Horse Hill in the south. The Walks are described in detail in two books published by Nick Moon: 'The d'Arcy Dalton Way across the Oxfordshire Cotswolds and Thames Valley', (1999) and 'Oxfordshire Walks, Oxford, The Cotswolds and the Cherwell Valley' (1998). Both books are published by The Book Castle.

Missing footbridge



Photo: Liz Adams

Building on the experience of the first survey and following a suggestion of Dan Weeks, it was decided to develop proformas on which to record more detailed information for each defective stile, bridge or gate. I thank Peter Ewart and John Eyre for their assistance with the format of the proformas. This, together with photographs, will provide the Countryside Service with specific information on the necessary repairs to the path infrastructure to bring it up to standard.

Another innovation has been self-adhesive decals with a 'circular route' logo to put on way marks and finger posts in order to define the circular walk.

I am most grateful to those OFS volunteers who, armed with proformas and detailed track-log plans of their circular walk, undertook the survey. It required a careful assessment, and often measurement, particularly of the stiles to see if they conform to standard. The very wet weather of the early summer did not help. (It is impossible to record information on paper which gradually deteriorates to a soggy mess if it rains!)

However steady progress was made; the first set of surveys of five completed walks was handed to the Countryside Service in mid-June and the remaining five walks completed by mid-August.

In general it was found that the path infrastructure was in good shape. However a number of stiles, and in a very few cases bridges, will require some degree of repair work to make them more accessible. The most common problem with stiles is that the lowest footplate is too high (ideally no higher than 350mm) or too narrow, or indeed altogether missing. A few way mark posts were found to have rotted off at the base and were either lying on the ground or propped against a nearby hedge. The quality of gates, both wooden and metal, varied greatly. The most common feature of a poor quality gate resulted from a misalignment, through movement, of the supporting posts with the effect that it did not close properly.

Placing a decal



Photo: Jim Parke

One encouraging development of the survey work undertaken by the Society is that there is evidence that the County Council's Countryside Service is attending to the problems identified in our first survey. As the circular walks incorporate sections of the d'Arcy Dalton Way we have been able to check that poor stiles have been repaired or, better still, replaced by kissing gate as has happened in a number of cases. The Countryside Service is very appreciative of the Society's survey work. It is hoped that co-operation between the Society and the Countryside Service will continue and prosper in the future.

Jim Parke

Residential Visit to Cardigan

12 – 16 Sept 2011

Leaders: Alison Broadbridge and Tilley Smith

All eleven of us knew our holiday had started when we met together for a cream tea picnic, home baked and supplied by Alison, at Cenarth. Cenarth has a salmon leap – and a salmon was seen leaping! The Coracle Centre is also there and contains a unique collection of coracles from all over the world including one in which a Vietnamese family escaped from hostilities hundreds of miles across the sea. The collector is an enthusiastic and knowledgeable guide who had also restored the water mill.

Tuesday day 2, we walked along the River Teifi through ancient woodland with interesting flora and some steep paths, had coffee and welsh cakes in the Wildlife centre, visited the ruins of the magnificent Cilgaron castle and stopped at the bird hides. We missed the kingfishers but saw herons and various wildfowl. On our way home through the marshes huge buffalo were grazing –quite a sight in the September sunshine.

On Wednesday our walk was along an eleven mile section of the Cardigan coastal path with an option of stopping off half way at Mwnd. Mwnd is a scenic spot with a beach, a car park and a busy little kiosk well patronised by us. The sea was quite rough but this did not deter one of us from donning her swimsuit for a dip.

There is also a tiny white pilgrim chapel surrounded by a grave yard and set away from the cove which is still used for services and had great atmosphere. The ascents in the afternoon were quite challenging but very rewarding in terms of magnificent views and a few sightings of a seal.

A sizable MoD site meant we had to divert inland to reach the village where we were very glad to see our minibus waiting for us. We revived enough to enjoy an evening of Welsh hospitality in the Eagle hostelry.

Day 3, Thursday, saw us travelling to the starting point in the minibus – a section of

coast path recently engineered and created by local Ramblers. The views were magnificent, the weather perfect – blue skies and autumn sunshine- the ascents were challenging and sometimes the path dropped away steeply. We saw the odd seal and when we stopped at a beach, once again with a little coffee kiosk, we were told the seals' breeding place was in the next cove.

Indeed a walk to remember for the physical challenge as well as the scenery. We reached Newquay to watch dolphins – an exciting first sighting for some of us – and to have our ice cream or cream tea. After a quick shower we set off that evening to visit Dogmaels Abbey and the working water mill. The miller had 5 minutes worth of water to turn the wheel and in that time we saw the mill wheel start up and the grain ground to flour.

In the twilight, with bats emerging above us, we had a tour of the ruined abbey with a guide who described things in a way that made the monks' working days come to life. We left at 11pm after a beautifully presented delicious meal of local lamb, salmon and cheese, many of us bearing purchases of milled flour, cheeses, and craft gifts. Another wonderful day.

Friday, the weather changed – we explored Cardigan castle then set off in a tiny open boat for a trip on the estuary. The heavens duly opened and within minutes we were sitting in a puddle of water with our feet in another. This caused much hilarity but all was quickly rectified in the hotel before we set off home.

Cardigan is a lovely town with little independent shops. A huge cardigan, a patchwork of knitting of local scenes and the town's history has pride of place in the craft gallery. Tilley and Alison contributed some knitting when they did the recce for our visit. The planning of our visit was immaculate – everything we needed – the loos, the coffee kiosks, the good eateries, the minibus trips were organised to perfection – even the dolphins and the weather were to order. Thank you Tilley and Alison – a trip to remember for us all.

Ann Partridge

Residential visit to Abingworth

16 – 19 May 2012

The HF house at Abingworth (West Sussex) is a really luxurious hotel in 8 acres of grounds. The facilities were first class, en-suite rooms, lovely food and a comfortable sitting area. There was also an excellent boot and drying room. Everything was included in the cost, the only extras were bar and newspaper bills.

We met on the journey down at a canal car park close to the Onslow Arms in Loxwood for a 4½ mile walk which Sue Crisp and Janice Ure has sorted out at the same time as they had tried the house out a while ago. It proved to be a very interesting walk across pastureland and along the Wey and Arun Junction Canal. Sue mentioned that a local group of enthusiasts became interested in the canal, and having carried out some research into its history formed the Wey and Arun Canal Society in 1970 with a view to reopening it.

On our arrival at Abingworth we were allocated our rooms and afternoon tea/coffee and cakes were served in the lounge, followed by a welcome talk and tour around the grounds by the walks leaders. Every evening we all met at 7pm for a briefing about the three walks on offer for the next day. This was followed by our evening meal.

Looking down into Cuckmere Haven



Photo: Alison Broadbridge

The next day (Thursday) we left the house at 9.20am by coach towards Eastbourne where the three walking groups were dropped off at the appropriate starting points for the coastal walks in the vicinity of Beachy Head and Birling Gap. The easier walk of 4¾ miles with 625 feet of ascent, the medium: 8 miles and 850 feet of ascent and

the hard: 10½ miles with 1375 feet of ascent.

After the seventh 'sister' it was down into Cuckmere Haven and a welcoming cup of tea at the visitor centre tea shop before the coach picked us up to return to Abingworth. We were lucky as the weather was great and the wind behind us!

The three HF leaders had arranged another interesting evening which included trying to figure out what strange old items we were given has been used for in the past.

The Chanctonbury Ring



Photo: Liz Adams

Friday morning we were out again driven by coach to our respective dropping off point for the walks to Cissbury and Chanctonbury Rings, the spectacular Iron Age Forts, walking along the South Downs Way and the Monarch's Way and finishing in Steyning. The easier walk of 6¾ miles, medium 8½ and the harder one 12 miles with increasing amounts of ascent. By the time we reached Steyning the rain had closed in but there was time for tea and to visit the wonderful church. On our last evening we had a Ceilidh at which guests were encouraged to show their hidden talents, firstly by a group of ukulele improvers (a special interest group on a course running adjacent to ours). The six of them were amazing on their ukuleles, singing along as they played. Several other people entertained us including Peter Ewart from our group, and the whole evening was interspersed with some country dancing.

On the way home to Oxford John and June Henville had organised a walk around the Polseden Lacey National Trust Estate. Thanks to Sue Crisp for organising such a great short break.

Clive and Ann Jones

The southern Section of the Oxfordshire Way

2- 4 June 2012

Millions watched the Diamond Jubilee Celebrations but Liz and Eme's intrepid followers focussed on The Oxfordshire Way, brushing through rape fields ("high as an elephant's eye"), more fields of rape and, secateurs rampant, the forgotten ways through wood and copse. In a field of wind-flattened, rain-heavy grass sagging against our knees we came across a willow, storm-blown across the path; decisions, decisions. Do we crawl under the trunk (gymnastic skills permitting) or go round through the bog?

A warning of the water to come?



Photo: Eme Pilgrim

You do recall how wet it was that weekend, don't you? Maybe you were drily ensconced in front of your television, open-mouthed at the BBC's risible attempt to add a common touch to proceedings; or were you being valiantly British and weathering the local Big Lunch? We, the undaunted, dried out our trousers and boots overnight and reported for car-organising with a firm conviction that weather systems only last four hours in the UK, and, anyway, the forecasters are often more pessimistic than the indications warrant. Sue put up her umbrella.

After all, Saturday had finished on a bright note; we sat in the sunshine at Waterperry Gardens, treated to very much appreciated pots of tea by Liz and Eme, and counted the golf balls we'd picked up en route, failed to identify all the flowers we'd seen, and stretched our brains (bar Adam who worked it all out in a flash, of course) over the logistics of cars for the morrow. We'd

seen dozens of deer, a heron, hares, an hours-old calf with its mother and a bored bull. (Michael, what would we do without you!) Lunch had been taken just past the scene of a murder, the only dry patch, albeit on the verge of a drive. Postman Pat's van clipped our toe space but he waved and smiled merrily. Did he think we were bonkers?

Sue's umbrella was stylish. We were all 'stylised 'on Sunday. At the last count, Michael said we had, on Sunday, surmounted the challenge of 38 stiles; slippery, wobbly, obstacles of varied height and pitch, often embedded in cow-trodden mud, once even in liquid manure. Another hare sprang from its' form right under Liz's foot and a deer was only 20 feet away as I came around a corner in the wood. Both were fast and silent. We were neither, but we were still happy. It wasn't just the challenge of 11+ miles each day; it was enjoyment of good company, of varied landscapes, of identifying Comfrey and smelling the May, of seeing Queen Anne's Lace shimmering across wide stretches of green. Despite the warning signs I saw no snakes.

In Tetsworth, I ate lunch in a bus shelter (all smells rinsed away by the rain) and watched the villagers organising their beer fest lunch: much wielding of polythene sheeting and clamping down of tent pegs; much jolly music and self-deprecating laughter. I'm so glad this is my country! The clouds hung low. We looked to the SE, wondering if HM sailed under lighter skies.

No tea on the second day. No sunshine. The promise of hot baths was too urgent. And on Monday there was to be the morning challenge of the hill climb to Christmas Common. Then, would you believe it? - The sun blazed into the car as I drove home around the Oxford Eastern Relief Road!

Thank you Liz and Eme! Shall we do it in reverse next year?

Lesley Frazer

Sadly Lesley could not manage the final leg on Monday from Pyrton to Henley; the day dawned fair and we started with the long climb up to Christmas Common with good views and clearly marked paths so we

made good progress. It was such a relief after the rain of the day before, the Chilterns were washed clean.

Sun at last



Photo: Kazie Wishnewski

At various times we saw support cars and groups of walkers wearing orange T- shirts and wondered who they were. All became clear after our descent into Henley, volunteers completing a sponsored walk for the Muscular Dystrophy charity, the whole length from Bourton on the Water to Henley in three days. I can't imagine managing 20plus miles in the dire weather on Sunday. We walked down to the river and bridge, the official end of the Way, it was such a sense of achievement to have completed the route. Seven of us have walked the whole route over two Bank Holidays, others still have a few sections to finish. In the lea of the bike sheds at Henley Station, in light drizzle, we toasted the Queen and ourselves for having completed the Oxfordshire Way.

The 'Magnificent Seven'



Photo: Kazie Wishnewski

The Oxfordshire Way is available to download in 43 very clear maps from the

Oxfordshire County Council website and is very easy to follow with the additional sheets of 'Interesting Notes' pages about the villages on the way.

Liz Adams

Footpath Diversions, etc.

The modification order for the path from Milton Common to the middle of Waterstock Golf Course has been made. It is possible that the missing link to FP4 could be established in due course. The order for the extension of Chalgrove FP8, to provide for the replacement of a bridge that was removed in 2001, has also been made.

The order limiting St. Helen Without BR2 (along the south side of Lansdowne Road at Wootton) to 3 metres has been quashed, as the Inspector was satisfied that the width was in excess of three metres (without specifying said width).

We have also received a consultation on Rotherfield Greys FP23, where the owner wishes to straighten the path alongside some new woodland.

The inquiry into the upgrading of Highmoor FP21 to bridleway took place on June 20; we await the result.

We have also received a consultation on upgrading Stonesfield BR6 (part of the Oxfordshire Way, opposite the bridleway to Charlbury) to byway, which would mean cars being able to use it. The horse riders are likely to oppose this.

An alternative route has been proposed for the diversion of Sydenham BR7; we await the decision of the owner and OCC which route to make the order for.

The diversion order for Watlington FP1 has been re-advertised, this time with the correct grid references. The order for footpath C at Didcot has been reissued as a stopping-up order to take effect when the alternative route is established.

It looks as if the long-standing obstruction (getting on for 60 years) may be resolved reasonably shortly, as the new owner seems to be about to apply to divert the path as part of a planning application.

David Godfrey

The Devil's Quoits.

A strange standing stone circle or henge near Stanton Harcourt, Oxfordshire. Some sources place it number three in Britain after Stonehenge and Avebury. Being of antiquity it was around in the Roman era but was down to three stones by the start of WWII. The whole area was levelled to construct an airfield for use during the war. After the war the airfield was abandoned and gradually decayed. Many of the buildings including an old petrol pump are still to be seen.

The area is now a major source of gravel extraction. The pits thus formed are either left as fishing lakes or more recently used for landfill. Planning permission is granted on the understanding that the area is reinstated when landfill is completed. The current contractor has not only landscaped the surface but re-erected the henge as archaeologists assume it appeared in Roman times. To this end they have found the three "original" stones and supplemented them with new similar stone quarried locally.

The re-constructed henge consists of a 115m diameter bank and internal 2m deep ditch, with entrances to the east and west. The 75m diameter stone circle occupying the interior has 28 conglomerate stones, with an additional stone standing slightly offset to the south.

The Quoits



Photo: John Eyre

The site derives its name from a formation myth. Folklore tells how the devil was playing a game of quoits one Sunday, but was chastised by God for defiling the day of rest. In anger, the devil cast aside his quoits, throwing them as far as he was

able. Where one quoit fell, the henge now stands.

The quoits at GR SP4112/0475 can either be accessed from the end of the road to the Recycling and Waste Centre" at SP 4086/0447 where there is a permissive path (the shorter walk) or from a footpath going west immediately south of Stanton Harcourt village SP 4156/0540.

John Eyre

Volunteer Work Parties

You may be disappointed to read that a bit of summer rain dampened our enthusiasm for carrying out footpath improvement work. We made a good start before the deluge descended upon us by assisting the Cotswold Wardens constructing two wooden kissing gates (to replace stiles) and were most impressed by the standard of work we helped to achieve, but perhaps work not best suited to our efforts at present.

Our next venture was the erection of marker posts that did prove to be within our capabilities. Five of us made short work of two marker posts at a complex pair of junctions on the dDW. It was soon evident that there was more to this work than you might realise, with the careful positioning to ensure the posts remained vertical during backfilling and compaction. The odd root and stones made for good exercise digging the post holes deep enough to satisfy our Countryside Service task masters. There was an equal need for volunteers to tackle the lighter tasks, the posts required the careful alignment of the way mark discs, checked for visibility and the area left tidy with the grass that was initially removed, replaced around the posts.

Peter Ewart

Committee News

When booking a holiday with Ramblers Holidays, you can now nominate the Society to receive funding via the Walking Partnership. The Society will also receive money from Amazon if you use the link on the Affiliations Links page on the website.

The committee would like to thank Adam for continuing to update the website. The Editor would like to thank all those members who have contributed articles and pictures for the newsletter and to thank Adam for setting it out in its final form.