



OXFORD FIELDPATHS SOCIETY

NEWSLETTER

Issue 16: September 2010

From the Chairman

On a glorious June day David Godfrey led a walk to celebrate the 30th anniversary of the dedication of the Farmoor Reservoir footpaths. It was particularly appropriate that our President Jack Ibbott and his wife Margaret were present before the walk started. Suitably toasted with champagne it gave me much pleasure to give them, on behalf of the committee, certificates conferring Honorary Life Membership in acknowledgement of their contributions to the Society over many years, including negotiating the retention of the Farmoor footpaths. Escorting them to and from Farmoor I was reminded how much work, both physical and with the pen, past and present members have done for the Society, and of course the general public, in fighting for the preservation of the footpath network that enables us to derive so much pleasure walking in Oxfordshire.

Margaret and Jack Ibbott



Photo: John Eyre

This summer has been one of ideal walking weather after two years of indifferent conditions and it has been encouraging that most walks have been well supported. The footpaths have been, in places, overgrown with shoulder high nettles especially on the less walked trails. Obviously at this time of year wholesale clearing of paths cannot be undertaken to ensure nesting birds are not disturbed. However, after an inspiring talk by Howard Dell at the AGM, it is planned that we will join with the South Oxfordshire Volunteer Path Maintenance team to learn the hows and wherefores of doing this, working with the assent of the landowner and

County Council. Obviously health and safety considerations have to be clarified and insurance cover in place before we start. With the financial constraints being placed on the authorities, path surveying and clearing is a way we can make a positive contribution as well as justifying our charitable status. Anyone who would like to be involved please contact John Eyre (☎ 01235 522276).

Slipping on banana skins...

Aren't compost bins amazing? You throw in your used tea leaves, fruit and vegetable peelings, garden greenery, the odd piece of cardboard or some shredded paper and then the small red worms get to work and in a few months you have this wonderful, dark brown compost to spread on your garden. It is a small miracle. So, you might think that all these things would be just as beneficial left about in the countryside, but....

Tossed under the hedge or dropped by the side of the path, banana skins can take about 3 to 4 weeks to decompose, paper bags and paper tissues a month or more and orange peel up to six months. It is quite surprising.

On a lovely walk I joined earlier this year, our leader took us to a wonderful coffee stop on the side of the valley. There was even a bench and a grassy slope to sit on. Everyone enjoyed the break but, as we prepared to leave, several people threw their fruit skins and tissues onto the grass under the bushes. I am sure they thought they were doing the right thing, but the bright colours drew the eye instantly. I wish I'd had the courage to speak up and have wondered since how many other walkers grimaced at our 'litter' before it disappeared completely. Do you think they enjoyed the picnic site as much as we had done?

So, may I make a plea that we all take every scrap of 'litter' back home with us and leave the landscape uncluttered by our debris? Sadly there are plenty of people who do not respect our beautiful countryside, but let us do our best to keep it tidy. PLEASE!

June Henville

The Mortimer Trail May 2010

Came a rainy, windy morning on a Saturday in late May as fourteen enthusiastic OFS members turned up at the Wheely Wonderful Cycling base at a farm near Ludlow. Seeing racks of mountain bikes, we wondered if we were expected to pedal push our way up and down the steep inclines all around us but fortunately not--minibuses took us to our starting place in the little town of Kington in Herefordshire near the Welsh border and we set off for our first 6 miles of the Mortimer Trail. From then on we went back and forth across various county lines and bits of England or Wales in a most intriguing and apparently haphazard way.

The Trail is a new 31 mile walking route along a succession of ridges and deep dips and we achieved it in three days, with two overnight stops at the historic Radnorshire Arms Hotel in Presteigne ending on the third day at the famous Feathers Hotel in Ludlow.

Off we go



Photo: Jane Jackson

Our first afternoon's section started in sun as we walked up and away from Kington over farm land, crossing a rather muddy Offa's Dyke bank and on through fields and a wooded area under pine trees to a lovely narrow walk edging along a beech wood with distant views on one side and a steep drop into the trees beneath on the other. Orchids were seen nearby. Large nettles too--another fortnight and they would be lush and really vicious, we thought. There were more woods and open farmland and then a long track down to the small rather handsome village of Titley where our minibuses were waiting to take us to Presteigne and the Radnorshire Arms a half timbered building dating to the Elizabethan period.

We wondered whether the ghosts would be walking at night through the oak-panelled rooms, the underground tunnels and the priest's hole. However, the hotel has been very well modernised and upgraded, we had a warm and

welcoming reception, the food was good and none of us complained of creaking floors, spectral sights or candles suddenly blown out.

On then, back to Titley to start our second day which was a mixture of sun and clouds giving us a beautiful and very varied 12 miles walk, up and down, hills and valleys sweeping away on either side, well kept fields, forests and bluebell woods. We went past Wapley Hill Fort and along paths lined by tall pines to a ridge overlooking the valley of the Lugg river, down and steeply up again, on and past tiny Byton church and the Sunday morning service, more woods and a forest road to Covenhope Farm. It was a long time since our elevenses so we had a good picnic break in the farmer's field when suddenly a great whoosh of galloping sheep came thundering by. The farmer explained to us that he and his son and the dogs were going to sort out some sheep to take to market and then all was quiet again.

Rounding up the sheep



Photo: Jane Jackson

The last section of Sunday's walk consisted of four miles along the River Lugg, an SSSI with otters, crayfish and spawning salmon (none spotted by us however). It was beautiful walking through Sned Wood and beside the gorge, passing an old Victorian water mill to end at the Riverside Inn at Aymestrey, just in time to buy our drinks before afternoon closing time and enjoy them by the tranquil river and ancient bridge. Back we went in the minibuses to the hotel and had a very pleasant dinner and get-together after an excellent day's walk.

We returned again next morning to Aymestrey on May Bank Holiday for a demanding but very attractive and varied walk of about 13 miles to Ludlow. We climbed up and up across woods and fields through forested areas of pines and oaks. There were great views over to the Black Mountains, the Radnor Hills and towards Long Mynd and Montgomery away to the north. We went near Croft Castle which has been the

home of the Croft family pretty well continuously since the days of Edward the Confessor, but it was closed to visitors that day. If we had had more time here we would have looked around the National Trust's Croft Ambrey Iron Age hill fort which has a fabulous position above the valleys of the Lugg and the Teme; from the top of the fort it is possible to see 14 counties. Another day perhaps.

On we went along forest roads and common land with the Malverns and BBC transmitter aerials in the distance, finally reaching the extensive ancient Mortimer Forest. Here and there were large open grassy areas with lovely views across the forest below towards the Malvern Hills and Ludlow, which we finally reached by a pretty woodland trail, fetching up on the great bridge with the castle walls above. A gentle stroll through the medieval streets of 'the most beautiful small town in England' brought us to the famous half-timbered Feathers Hotel and the end of our journey.

Final destination



Photo: Jane Jackson

Three of us returned home while others were able to stay one night at the Feathers. All had enjoyed a wonderful walking holiday in excellent company and we were extremely well served by our leaders: Elizabeth Adams (who organized the trip), John and June Henville and Kay and Chris Dartnell of Wheely Wonderful Cycling.

Jane Jackson

Footpath Diversions and Other Matters

Permission has been granted for the proposed wind farm at Fewcott, near the M40. An application for two more turbines at Oddington Grange close to FPs 1 and 2, which cross at the former abbey moat, has been withdrawn. We have just received a curious proposal for diversion at Uffington. Part of this is obviously to deal with an estate that was built long ago in the days when people regularly forgot to put in the required diversion; the rest diverts the path a few feet closer to the school, with the new path partly shown running along the top of the school fence, which could be painful.

The order at North Newington FP7 at Tythe Farm (moving the path from one side of the hedge to the other, out of the garden) has been confirmed.

The claims for a town green at Warneford Meadow, and a footpath continuing the dead-end at Lower Shiplake to the road, have been confirmed in the High Court, the parties having decided not to appeal further. Likewise the applicants at Mill Lane, Shiplake, have decided not to appeal against the ruling that it is a restricted byway rather than a byway open to all traffic (and is therefore barred to motor vehicles, except for access).

David Godfrey

The Walks Leader is your friend

It has come to our notice that some walkers have phobias, or at least a strong dislike of certain aspects of country life. A common dislike is crossing open fields containing farm animals. Walking through a herd of frisky cows, especially if they have horns, can be intimidating and horses that come up and nudge your rucksack with their nose can be quite frightening. However friendly they have size and weight on their side.

Another dislike is crossing over fast moving traffic on what appears a flimsy bridge with minimal open guard rails. This is not every ones ideal location when walking in the more tranquil countryside.

If any of the above fit your fears please discuss the matter with the leader as soon as the problem arises as in nearly all cases a satisfactory solution can be found without the drastic outcome of the walker having to turn back and return to the starting point.

What is your pet dislike – farm animals or bridges?

John Eyre

Oxford Transport Plan

The Oxford Transport Plan forms part of Oxfordshire County Council's Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA). This is required to consider: air quality, climatic factors, noise, bio-diversity, population, human health, soils, water/flooding, material assets (quarrying), culture, heritage, landscape/townscape and will relate to the period 2011 to 2030 so it is important that we have some input. The objectives of the Plan are to: secure infrastructure, reduce carbon emissions, improve air quality, develop public transport and to ***promote and support cycling and walking.***

To date three stages of consultation have taken place. At each stage the number of responses has dropped – not surprising as at the end of stage two there were 590 schemes, all bar 4 of which were either very minor traffic management related, or in many cases, actually related to footpaths & cycleways. Thus we have the development of walking very much at the centre of the Transport Plan. The third stage was a drop-in event to discuss the scenarios that are being developed and the submission of those we feel to be most appropriate for Oxford City; the larger and smaller towns and the rural areas.

The next stage is to consider the scenarios that could be adopted over the next 20 years. This consultation is underway now and detail may be seen on www.oxfordshire.gov.uk and I will do my utmost to promote OFS's interests in the preparation of this plan.

Peter Ewart

Residential visit to Longmynd, Church Stretton, Shropshire 2010

Our residential visit began on 26 April when twenty four OFS Members arrived at Church Stretton, twenty two staying at the Longmynd Hotel and two staying in their caravan. Church Stretton is a small friendly market town situated in the Shropshire Hills, an area of outstanding beauty. The hotel which was very comfortable had been recently refurbished to a very high standard, it even had an outdoor swimming pool which was heated, and I believe Sue and Janice took advantage of this luxury. In the grounds of the hotel was a woodland walk and sculpture trail, consisting of animals and birds carved from stumps and fallen trees.

On the afternoon we arrived John and Joyce Dawson took us on a short walk from the hotel, through Church Stretton and on to the Bould

Hill area. This was a delightful walk and gave us a taster of what was to come. The alternative walk was lead by John Eyre, walking up Carding Mill Valley and ascending to Longmynd.

Longmynd - the Shropshire hills



Photo: Sally Shepherd

The second day the choices were a full day in the Iron Bridge Gorge area, walking along the Severn Gorge over the famous bridge, passing some of the museums on route. This was lead by Sue Crisp. Walking in the Stiperstones was the alternative walk lead by John and June Henville, which Sally and I decided on.

A memorable walk especially as we were surrounded by so many sheep and new born lambs. We saw more sheep in those few days than we have seen in a life time. We were surprised that lamb was not offered on the hotel menu!

The Stiperstones

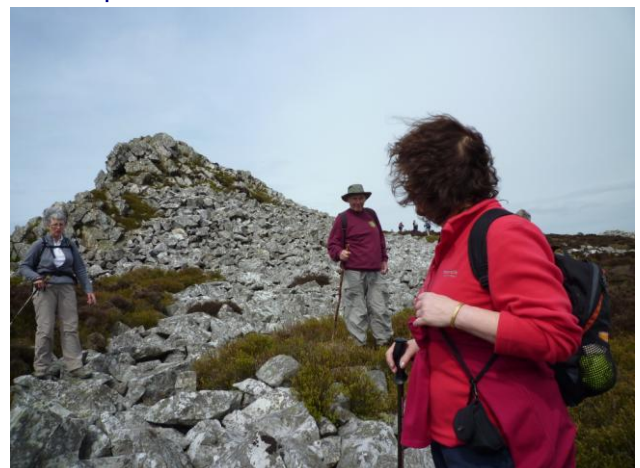


Photo: Sally Shepherd

The third day Lorna's walk was in the Batch Valley and on to Longmynd, which is a large long plateau comprising of many hills and moorland with marvellous views. Again this was a wonderful walk, we even came upon alpacas in assorted colours, which we understood from

their owner were being kept for their wool to make jumpers. The alternative walk was a full day walk in Wenlock Edge to Corve Dale lead by Liz Adams.

On the last day, before our journey home, our final walk to end a perfect holiday was lead by Michael .We started at Stokesay Castle which is a fine example of a fortified Manor House. The walk took us on three modest climbs, a wooded section and again we saw beautiful views over an unchanged landscape, more sheep again, even the rain didn't spoil things.

The hotel sculptures



Photo: Sally Shepherd

However the highlight of the week for Sally and I must be the moonlight walk Michael took us on. One evening after dinner (and maybe a glass of wine or two!) he took us arm in arm with lots of laughter for a walk around the nature trail to see the sculptures which were just as beautiful by night!

A truly memorable week walking, scenery , weather, sheep, wild flowers which I believe Jo and fellow walkers counted at least thirty one different ones. Not to forget the company of our fellow OFS members, made it all so enjoyable and many thanks to Sue Crisp and John Eyre for organising it.

De Grant and Sally Shepherd

Annual Skittles Evening 2001 – 2010

As we have just completed a decade of this enjoyable event and as I am about the only one who has attended every evening (except the hard-working organizers Lew and Pat Gammon) I've been asked by our chairman to write a brief 'history' of the event.

The first six venues were at the Gardeners Arms in Tackley. However the standard of food and service began to deteriorate so Lew and Pat decided to relocate the short distance to

Sturdy's Castle on the main Banbury Road where we have remained quite happily for the past four years.

From the outset it quickly became a popular fixture in the OFS calendar and over the years has brought a great deal of pleasure to so many of our members.

Modesty forbids me to say who has captained the winning team on most occasions but just take a look at the photo!

One of my winning teams!



Photo: Brian Colley

On behalf of all of the membership it is congratulations and thanks to Lew and Pat for all their efforts, we are looking forward to the next decade.

Brian Colley

Obituary:

Anneke Siertsema 1938 - 2010

It is with deep sorrow that we have to record the passing of Anneke. She joined the Society in 1972 and soon became a member of the Executive Committee responsible for running the Society. Her most stalwart role was to hold the position of Membership Secretary for eighteen years. The card index system that she operated is still in use today although now supplemented by a computer data base.

Another facet of her life was as a tour guide for the City of Oxford instilling the wonders and diverse of the city to tourists. Anneke did not believe in pre-recorded messages and she could often be seen on the top of an open bus telling the passengers how it was.

A memorial service was held on the 15th April at St. Columba's United Reformed Church, Oxford. It was well attended by current members. She will be missed by family and friends.

John Eyre

Walking in a Winter Wonderland

On the morning of Saturday 9th January 2010 Oxford woke to around six inches of snow, a temperature of -5°C and a beautiful cloudless sky. Being walks leader that day I was not going to fail to be at the 10 o'clock meeting point. You know me – I turned up on my bicycle. Godfrey was perhaps rather more sensible in his 4x4 car, but then he is used to 'real weather' in Scandinavia!!

Walking in snow



Photo: Robert Yates

It might have been early January, but how often does OFS set off on a walk looking more like a ski club? The walk is a favourite of mine, being a canal lover, but I have never seen Hampton Gay Manor looking more beautiful. I am just sorry that more people did not enjoy it.

Robert Yates

A Weekend in Lancashire, August 2009.

It saddens me to find how many 'Southerners' have no idea that there is a lot of beautiful scenery and good walking county in Lancashire. They imagine rows of back-to-back houses and bleak mill towns, so just speed through on their way to Scotland or the Lake District. It was therefore a great pleasure for me to be able to introduce a group from OFS to some of the delights of Lancashire – though some of those who came already know the area well.

There were 17 in the party who travelled up to Lancashire by car on Friday, the journey is not all that far so the car I was in arrived by lunch time and checked in at the 'Sparrow Hawk Hotel' in Burnley, a town which has known better days. We then set off to find one of the local millennium monuments, the Singing Ringing Tree. Up on the fells it was quite impressive and did sing when the wind blew through the column of metal pipes. From this point we also had a good view over to Pendle Hill, our destination for Saturday.

After dinner most of the group set off to follow the Town Trail to see the old buildings from the town's more glorious days but were unfortunately overtaken by a heavy shower so made our return for an early night.

The Singing Ringing Tree



Photo: John Eyre

Pendle Hill (557m) overlooks Burnley so wherever you venture from the town the hill is always the dominant feature. After an early breakfast on a beautifully sunny Saturday, we set off to Barley for the start of the 8 mile walk. Pendle Hill gains its notoriety from the execution, in 1612, of members of some local families accused of witchcraft.

View over Burnley with Pendle Hill in the distance



Photo: John Eyre

We ascended the hill from the south side, gradually making our way to the top, passing the Ogden Reservoir and sheep grazing on the hillside. Perfect walking weather, with a nice cooling breeze we enjoyed the lovely flora and smells from the woodland trees. A short break for a drink and chat to other walkers and runners then a steady pull brought us to the top of Pendle Hill amongst the purple heather and what a magnificent view awaited us. Lunchtime beckoned so after the inevitable photo shoot

around the trig point we sat to enjoy the food and the views.

At the trig point



Photo: Gwyneth Tyson

A very steep descent down into the village again, with different flowers and the skyline ever changing. Back down in Barley we were delighted to find a little cafe in the car park serving delicious cakes and a cup of tea, while some chose the Pendle Inn for something cooler. This was a great days walking.

On Sunday the group split into two, the more energetic to walk Boulsworth Hill and the rest for a more sedate walk along the canals of Barrowford.

Barrowford Walk

We drove, through some beautiful Lancashire countryside, to the start point: Pendle Heritage Centre car park, the beginning of the Pendle Way. The weather was pleasant as we walked along Pendle water streams passing 17th and 18th Century handloom weaver's cottages and 19th and 20th century mills.

We crossed the footbridge over the Leeds - Liverpool canal by Barrowford locks and turned onto the towpath. Here two of the group left us for an even less strenuous walk further along the canal and to do some sketching. We continued following glistening streams, before a steady climb up to Blacko Tower, a structure that dominated our view. Unfortunately the tower has been inaccessible to the public for years; there is currently a campaign locally to regain access to this imposing landmark. At the high points of walk we could see Pendle Hill and the Bronte Moors.

On our descent from Blacko, we could see an inviting pub, which turned out to be the famous 'Moor Cock Inn', but in our excitement to get there we lost our route for a few minutes and in a strong gust of wind Michael Payton lost his hat into a gully, the hat and route were thankfully retrieved. The men then enjoyed very tasty local ale.

After our refreshments we continued to Admergill Waters, crossing well worn old slab footbridges, meadows and stone stiles. Our journey ended with a welcome cup of tea at Pendle Heritage Centre meeting up with the rest of our party.

Boulsworth Hill

I would think that a more historical start to a walk cannot be found elsewhere as we set off from Wycoller. In the first mile we walked passed an ancient Packhorse Bridge, a Clapper Bridge, the 'Aisled Barn' (now a museum of local history) and then the ruins of Wycoller Hall which are said to be the inspiration for Charlotte Bronte's Ferndean Manor as read in Jane Eyre.

To add to this, on the hillside to our left, we then saw 'Atom', one of the six local panopticons. (Like the Singing Ringing Tree mentioned earlier). After this excitement the walk took on a more normal feel as we trekked along parts of the Bronte Way up the beck to Boulsworth Hill. The final ascent was steep and demanding but we took rest at The Weather Stones, an outcrop of grit stone; enjoying the views for a while before finally reaching the summit at Lad Law (517m).

As it was a windy day we dropped off the summit to refresh ourselves with our packed lunches and to take in the views over Pendle Hill that we had walked the previous day. We then continued the walk down, carefully avoiding the boggy parts on the hillside; we passed Lumb Spout and Hollin Hall Mill before the final two steady miles back to Wycoller and a welcoming pot of tea.

The final day

To complete our visit we set off for Hurst Green on Monday morning to walk the 5 miles of the circular Tolkien Trail. It was while on holidays at a guest house in the grounds of Stonyhurst College, over a period of 16 years, that J R Tolkien compiled the trilogy 'The Lord of the Rings'. Here the route started through the grounds of the College then into the woods to follow the course of the river Hodder, to its junction with the Ribble and later the Calder.

We saw the old stone packhorse bridge reputed to have been used by Oliver Cromwell on his march from Skipton to the Battle of Preston in 1648. By lunch time we came to the end of our trip, and the end of the spell of beautiful weather, as most of the group then set off on the journey back to Oxford. A good introduction to Lancashire, thank you Gwyneth from us all.

Gwyneth Tyson, Chris Simlett and Nick Tomaszewski

OFS Donation to the Chiltern Society Donate a Gate scheme

Last year the Society made a donation to the Chiltern Society and at last the gates have been installed on footpath 27 in Bledlow. The gates are either side of the Chinnor to Princes Risborough railway line and are accessed from the lane running off Manor Close across to Bakehouse Farm. The money we donated was sufficient for two gates and was match funded by Buckinghamshire County Council to allow for one more gate to be placed in the same area.

We will be able to admire these gates on Saturday 9th October on a walk which has been designed by Nick Moon and will be led by him. If you can't make it then another walk organized by the Wycombe Ramblers is on 18th November, please check the walks programme for details. At the last committee meeting it was resolved to donate a further £750 to purchase three more gates, and we will keep you informed where they will be installed.

Footpaths and Railway Lines

OFS is seeking to preserve two of the existing footpath crossings across the Oxford Bicester railway. You may have been one of the 30 walkers who joined me on the circular walk using these two crossings and the bridleway near Charlton on Otmoor that are threatened with closure. This was the first walk I led and I called it a "Use it or Loose it walk".

In order to preserve these footpaths a Statement of Case has been submitted to the Public Inquiry Inspector stating why these footpaths should remain where they are. It became evident talking to Janice Ure, during our first summer evening walk, along what Chiltern Rail call the Beebont bridleway that I should look more closely at the local history ignored by the railway proposals.

The history of this bridleway crossing has turned out to be the history of agricultural life in the Otmoor villages. This is the long and sad story of the local agricultural workers who were first driven from their traditional open field system allotment strips, in the pre the parliamentary Enclosures of the 16th to 17th centuries and then in the later parliamentary Enclosures of the late 18th to mid 19th centuries.

Fortunately the County Archives have a map dated 1849 attached to the mid 19th Century

Enclosures Award documents that I was able to see and present a photo in my statement. This also shows the medieval open field system allotment strips known as Close Hedges that were to the south of what was Mansmoor Lane. What was once an important historic route is now merely an access road leading to Holts Farm. What is perhaps more surprising is that this took place concurrently with the coming of the Railway.

The map is made more enigmatic by the lightly pencilled line of the Buckinghamshire Railway drawn by a Victorian Engineer, through what was to become the Bridleway crossing. Mansmoor Lane/Road and what is now the bridleway crossing, therefore encapsulates the unhappy story of the long struggle that the local village agricultural workers had, culminating in that final Enclosure Award.

There will be a public inquiry, held at the Conference Centre in Park End Street, Oxford starting November 2. The programming meeting is on September 7. We will be arguing against the lengthy diversion of Oddington FP6 which runs from Charlton-on-Otmoor to Weston-on-the-Green and is being pushed a mile along the railway to Oddington Crossing, and against the proposed diversion of Mansmoor Road.

With thanks to Janice Ure for her inspiration & help with my research.

Peter Ewart

Committee Members

The Committee would like to thank Jeff Lampert for all his dedicated work in the field of publicity, especially keeping the Web Site up to date over some eleven years. We will miss your 'falling leaves'.

The OFS is always on the lookout for new members to join the Executive Committee.

The Executive Committee meets six times a year on a Wednesday evening. Why not become a committee member? As well as fieldpath work the coffee/tea and biscuits are an added incentive. If you have a particular skill you will be made particularly welcome.

This Newsletter has been assembled by Adam who has been co-opted onto the Committee for his expertise in computing. Thank you Adam.

John Eyre