

talking walking

Oxfordshire Ramblers Issue 58, Autumn 2023



A while ago I was skimming the spines of second hand books in the Helen and Douglas House charity shop in Wantage. My eye was taken by a poor little thing, thinner than the Watney's Red Barrel of my youth. It didn't have a dust jacket. Perhaps it had never had one, the book having been published in austere 1955. It was entitled simply *Belloc Essays*. I knew three things about Hilaire Belloc: his name, that he wrote before I was born, and that he was French. That said, his mother was English. Born in 1870, his father died two years later, shortly after losing the family fortune in a stock market crash. His mother returned to England with him and his four siblings. Sailing and walking were two of his passions, as was a young woman from California whom he met in London. After she had returned home, Belloc, deeply smitten, decided to woo her by following her. His meagre funds quickly ran out. His strength of purpose and character was revealed when he made his way on foot for a significant part of the 2870 miles from Philadelphia to San Francisco. Her family were against the match, so he retraced his steps. Nothing if not persistent, he married her six years later.

All of which is preamble to one of his essays, *The Views of England*, which includes our part of the country. "It so happens that England is traversed by remarkable and sudden ranges; hills with sharp escarpment overlooking great undulating plains." Such is not found anywhere elsewhere in Europe, he maintained. "... a man (this was written in 1910) who professes to consider, to understand, to criticise, to defend and to love this country, must know the Pennines, the Chilterns, the Mendips, and the Malverns ... Delamere Forest, the Hill of Beeston, from which all Cheshire may be perceived." You will see these views, he reminds us, in the work of our landscape painters "... Constable with his thick colours, Turner with his wonderment, and even the portrait painters in their backgrounds depend on the view of the plains from a height."

Cover : On the Ridgeway in the Marlborough. Photo Dave Cavanagh

Editor Dave Cavanagh davecavanagh1000@gmail.com
Unless otherwise stated, items were written by the editor.
Back issues www.ramblers-oxon.org.uk/magazine.html



Chair of Oxfordshire Ramblers Richard Birch richard.birch15@virginmedia.com

Website www.ramblers-oxon.org.uk **Facebook** @OxfordshireRamblers



View over Vale of White Horse to the Cotswolds (left) and Chilterns (right). Photo Dave Cavanagh

Having described the views from the Weald “both Kentish and Sussex” including, on a clear day, over London to the Chilterns, he switches to the view from the Berkshire hills (he might have been mortified if he had known that they had later been sequestered by Oxfordshire, although he did go to Oxford University) “or, better still, from Cumnor, or from the clump of trees above Faringdon.” Looking one way you can see the hill “where, as is most probable, Alfred thrust back the pagans.” In the other direction lies Oxford and beyond, to the left, the Cotswolds.

Belloc finishes by bewailing people who unreasonably talk the country down, or up, and generally moan “and the mass of it daily increases”. (What would Belloc have made of Twitter – sorry, X?) “It would be a wholesome thing”, he says, “if one could take such a talker and make him walk from Dover to the Solway”, making sure to take in the views on clear days. He concludes that “a man who has done that has seen England – not the name or the map or the rhetorical catchword, but the thing. And it does not take so very long.”



Ivinghoe Beacon.
Photo Owen Dawson



Vale Group walking away from Faringdon Folly. Photo John Gordon

Oxfordshire Ramblers

AGM

The Oxfordshire Ramblers Annual General Meeting will be on Saturday 20 January 2024 at 2 pm in Charlbury War Memorial Hall, Browns Lane Charlbury, Oxon OX7 3QW, organised by West Oxfordshire Ramblers. The AGM will be preceded by a talk at 1 pm by a member of Ramblers Board of Trustees.

There will be a walk in the morning, details of which will be provided later, including in the online walks programme. The hall will be open from 10 am.

Car parking in Charlbury is limited, please use the train or bus service if possible. There is limited parking for the disabled, so one is recommended to park near the Co-op in Brown's Lane.



Photo Pam Wheeler

Thame & Wheatley Group's footpath maintenance team

The Thame & Wheatley Ramblers Group set up a footpath maintenance team some years ago that has been undertaking general clearance and brushcutting activities to improve the accessibility for walkers in the 34 Oxfordshire parishes that comprise this group.

There is a dedicated group of 27 volunteers that have signed up to maintenance work and given the particular skillsets of the core team it was decided in 2023 to extend the activity scope to include stile repairs and gate installation; all in high demand. OCC supported this initiative and have supplied timber materials for stile repairs and replacement waymark posts as well as postcrete for resetting damaged metal fingerposts. The Thame & Wheatley Ramblers Group also dug into their coffers to provide fixings and extra specialist tools for post hole work.



Albury stile rebuild and path reopened

The highlight of 2023 for the maintenance team must be the installation of their first kissing gate at Castle Hill farm in Wheatley to replace a very awkward fence crossing. The three-man work team persevered in searing heat in early September to complete the gate installation and fencing tie-ins all in a single day. The whole pathway is now fully gated without any stiles or other barriers.

During 2023 to date there have been eight major maintenance outings all with varied tasks. The photos show some of these.



New kissing gate at Castle Hill farm

Bob Merry

*Team Leader - Footpath Maintenance Volunteers
Thame & Wheatley Ramblers Group*



Clearing overgrown and "lost" kissing gate and finger post in Holton

It was the habit of a doctor onboard a cruise liner, at the end of his surgery, to go the bar where Dick, the barman, always had a daiquiri ready for him. The doc loved daiquiris and always had one after surgery. One day Dick the barman runs out of almonds so he made a daiquiri with hickory as hickory was the only substitute he had. Doc comes in as usual and instantly realises that the daiquiri is not right.

"That's not almond daiquiri Dick."

"No, that's hickory daiquiri Doc."

Thame & Wheatley path maintenance, continued



Waterstock stile rebuild



**Aston Rowant
replacement waymark
post and fingerpost
repair**



Photo Nicola Jones

Blitz and Klean, the path maintenance team of Bicester and Kidlington Group, have been active during summer. The photos show the work of two teams of 10.

Below, left, shows before and after shots on North Aston footpath 2, whilst those on the right is of Lower Souldern footpath 10.



Photos Ian Baldwin



In Phoebe Wood near Millet’s Farm, Frilford.
Photo Wendy Thomas



Bicester & Kidlington Group went to London. Photo Gill Hawkin

People are typically shocked when they find out I’m a terrible electrician.

Replacing stiles with gates along the Oxford Green Belt Way

CPRE Oxfordshire, in partnership with Oxfordshire County Council, replaced several stiles in September in Nuneham Courtenay, Toot Baldon, Cumnor and Wytham along the Oxford Green Belt way (OGBW). Trust for Oxfordshire's Environment (TOE) gave a grant to enable this project to proceed.

The OGBW is a fifty-mile circular route exploring the countryside around Oxford, created by CPRE Oxfordshire in 2007 to highlight the importance of the Green Belt.

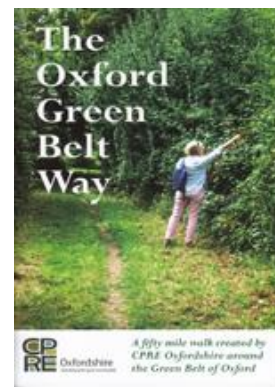
CPRE have published a revised full colour guide book with maps, directions and lots of fascinating information. The guide contains route maps for each stage of the Way and detailed route directions. The whole route is waymarked with OGBW discs.

The OGBW is accessible by regular bus services, from four of Oxford's Park and Ride sites, Oxford Parkway station and Radley station.

What's blue and isn't heavy? Light blue.



The Oxford Green Belt Way. From the website of the Long Distance Walkers Association.



Safety on walks



Accidents, or ill-health, can happen on any walk so it can help if you are prepared. In 2023 Oxfordshire Ramblers organised two First Aid courses and we will organise future courses as required. If you would like to go on a course then let a member of your Group Committee know so that we can add you to the waiting list.

Even if you know some First Aid you may still need an ambulance. It is important that you can give your exact location to the Emergency Services. There are a couple of useful free Apps that you can use to do this:

‘OS Locate’ which can be downloaded from the Ordnance Survey website for free, gives the six-figure grid reference and the altitude, and also has a compass. It does not need a mobile phone signal, just a GPS signal.

‘What 3 Words’ which can be downloaded from the what3words website. Your location is given by a unique combination of three words. If you use this when giving your location to the Emergency Services then it is critical that you get the spelling correct!

A Ramblers working group of 15 members, representing Groups from across England, Scotland and Wales, is developing a Walk Leader Guide and other resources. There will be the opportunity for Groups to comment on the Guide during the Autumn, with completion in early 2024. The intention is to change to ‘dynamic’ risk assessments i.e. continually monitoring and responding to risks whilst on the walk, which is what we have always done! This will mean that for the majority of our walks, walk leaders will not have to do a written risk assessment.



With most mobile phones you can enter your medical details and an emergency contact number which can be accessed even when your phone is locked. For example on an iPhone you enter these details in the ‘Health’ App. When you click on ‘Emergency’ on the bottom left of the screen you display this information by clicking on ‘Medical ID’.

In areas where there is a poor mobile signal you may not be able to make a phone call but you may be able to send a text as they need less bandwidth to be sent. You need to register your mobile phone before using the emergency SMS service. Following registration, by simply sending an SMS message to 999 you can call for help and the emergency services will be able to reply to you. Register your mobile phone with the service before an emergency happens by texting ‘Register’ to 999. You will receive confirmation that your mobile has been registered.

Safe walking!

Richard Birch

Oxfordshire Ramblers Walks Co-ordinator



Clearing a badly overgrown stile and approaches in Childrey parish. Photos Pat Rosum



Putting the finishing touches to a footbridge and stile in Stanford in the Vale parish. We have reported the collapsing footbridge to OCC.

path maintenance

Vale Group do path maintenance on the first Mondays and third Wednesdays of the month. The Vale Path Volunteers have worked at a dozen sites over summer and into September. Some tasks are too small for a big team so now they have occasional 'flying squads' comprising a handful of volunteers, sometimes doing work on one day in two parishes that are only a short drive apart, as on this page.

A bicycle can't stand alone; it is two tired.
 A will is a dead giveaway.
 Time flies like an arrow; fruit flies like bananas.
 A backward poet writes inverse.
 In a democracy it's your vote that counts; in
 feudalism, it's your Count that votes.
 A chicken crossing the road: poultry in motion.

Group AGMs are all in November

Details of Group AGMs should also appear in the online Walks Programme. If you are intending to attend an AGM, please check online in case arrangements have been changed, as well as for additional details.

Didcot and Wallingford

East Hagbourne Village Hall 18 November 2 pm during which there will also be a speaker from the Earth Trust.

West Oxfordshire

Combe Reading Room 11 November 1 pm.

Henley & Goring

Christ Church Centre, Reading Road, Henley-on-Thames RG9 1AG. 17 November 6.30 pm.

Thame & Wheatley

Lewknor Village Hall Saturday 11th November at 2 pm. It will be preceded by a walk. Bring your own picnic in the hall. After the AGM there will be a speaker.

Banbury & North Oxfordshire

The Plough PH, Bodicote, OX15 4BZ Saturday 11 November. The AGM will start at 1 pm with light refreshments available beforehand from 12.15.

Oxon Weekend Walkers

Plough Inn Wolvercote, Oxford, Sunday 26 November at 4 pm, preceded by a walk.
<https://www.theploughoxford.co.uk/>

Bicester & Kidlington

Fringford village hall Saturday 18 November at 3 pm..

Oxford City

The Victoria Arms, Old Marston, Saturday 4 November 1 pm.

Hike Oxfordshire

Cumnor United Reformed church hall Sunday 19 November 4.30 pm.

Vale

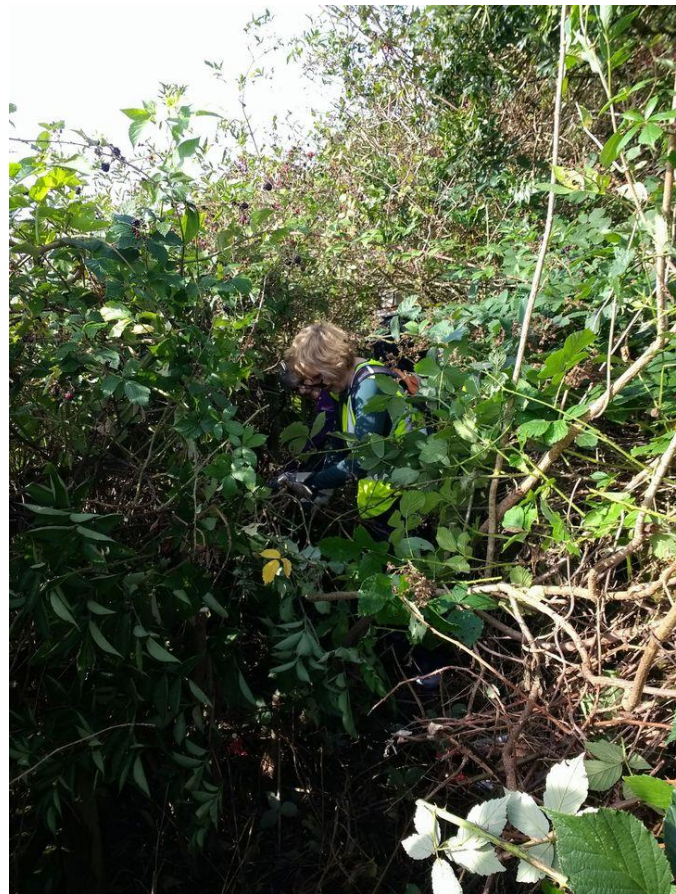
Stanford in the Vale village hall, Saturday 4 November. Walk at 1000 followed by a light lunch, with the AGM starting at 1330.



Blitz & Klean, the path maintenance team of Bicester & Kidlington Group, returned to a path in Souldern which had become massively overgrown. One way and another the weather this year has been a boon for plants. Photos Gill Hawkins and Ian Baldwin.



before



after



Here a couple of photos from Thame & Wheatley Group's annual holiday. They were taken on the ascent to the Great Ridge and on top of Mam Tor in the Peak District. Thirty-four stayed at the Old Hall Hotel in Buxton for 4 nights, with 3 days of walking.

Ruth Cornish



Photo Lindsey Saunders



Photo Leigh Guyatt

Two deer stalkers are walking across a remote moor in the West Highlands when one suddenly cries out and falls to the ground. He doesn't appear to be breathing and his eyes are rolled back in his head, so his friend panics and calls 999 on his mobile telephone.

"My friend is dead!" he cries. "What can I do?"

The operator, speaking in a soothing voice, tries to calm him down. "Just take it easy. I can help. First, let's make sure he's dead." The line goes silent for a moment and there's a loud bang before the man comes back on the line.

"Okay," he says breathlessly, "Now what?"

rest stop

As I'm sure that you are aware, many of the 3,535 shows at this year's Edinburgh Fringe involved humour. Arising from this is the Joke of the Fringe award, now in its 14th year. Initially a panel of comedy critics attend hundreds of shows, noting which jokes they think are the best. Somehow they arrive at shortlist of 10 jokes. A panel of 2,000 members of the public are then each asked to select their top three, which results in these 10 jokes being put in an order of acclaim. Here are the top five:

1. I started dating a zookeeper, but it turned out he was a cheetah
- Lorna Rose Treen
2. The most British thing I've ever heard? A lady who said 'Well I'm sorry, but I don't apologise.' - Liz Guterbock
3. Last year I had a great joke about inflation. But it's hardly worth it now - Amos Gill
4. When women gossip we get called bitchy; but when men do it's called a podcast - Sikisa
5. I thought I'd start off with a joke about The Titanic - just to break the ice - Masai Graham



Pub in Troutbeck, Windermere. Photo Dave Cavanagh

real rest stop



Vale Group at Ivinghoe Beacon, having walked the Ridgeway in 8 sections



Oxford City Group and friends.
Photo Keith Frayn



Bicester & Kidlington
Group eat cakes. Photos
Fiona Hitchcock



Vale Group by the Thames. Photo Peter Skuse

Celebrating the 50th Anniversary of the Ridgeway National Trail



Photo Mary Tebje

On 29 September, fifty years and two days after the opening of the Ridgeway National Trail on Coombe Hill, Bucks., over 70 people congregated there to celebrate its half-century. Attendees represented many organisations who had in common the desire for more people to visit the Ridgeway and to enjoy it and nearby attractions, savouring the past whilst looking to the future.

After much mingling, we heard first from Jo Burgon (left), who was the Ridgeway Officer from 1981-83. He was the first to quantify traffic on the Ridgeway, which caused horrendous damage to the surface for the first 30 years or so of this National Trail. Improvements came in the early 200s though recreational vehicles are still permitted on the Ridgeway in Wiltshire and West Berkshire during the drier half of the year. This is unfinished business. Current Ridgeway Officer Sarah Wright (right, who had worked tirelessly with her colleague Mary Tebje to deliver this event and other related actions) talked about contemporaneous matters, including an ambition to increase the diversity of people visiting the Ridgeway. The event was brought to a close by Dame Fiona Reynolds (centre, who had served as Director-General of the National Trust, and had had senior positions in the Council for National Parks and CPRE) who reminded us of the sheer joy to be had on our National Trails, in our National Parks and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty.





The four photos above, clockwise from top left: Brett Thorne, Keeper of Archaeology at the Discover Bucks Museum, including some replica swords of ones found on the downs; Will Lord (left) of Will Lord Prehistory supervises his colleague in pouring molten bronze into a mould for a sword; scraping remnants of the mould from the new sword; artist Anna Dillon brandishing the sword – she won the raffle.

Former President and Chair of Ramblers Kate Ashbrook with me, Dave Cavanagh. Kate was representing the Open Spaces Society, whilst I was there on behalf of Ramblers and Friends of the Ridgeway.





Viaduct near Moulsoford. Photo Sandra Newton



Photo Wendy Thomas

Identify your treasure, me hearties

Until I went to a talk by Dr Edward Carswell in Uffington, organised by the Friends of Tom Brown's School Museum, I had only a vague notion as to what counts as treasure. Indeed, as Dr Caswell explained, the definition has changed over the years.

An early interpretation was anything containing substantial amounts of gold or silver that had been buried and which was intended to be recovered e.g. after trouble had passed. This definition worked very well for the Crown authorities, who kept such things as were found (if they get wind of it). Excluded were objects containing precious metals that had not been intended to see the light of day e.g. objects placed in a coffin.

Edward Carswell is Oxfordshire's Finds Liaison Officer. He has many colleagues all over the country. Part of their job is to identify old objects – antiquaries – brought in by members of the public and others. Together these officers run the Portable Antiquaries Scheme (PAS), which includes a database of finds which can be easily searched by anyone on their website finds.org.uk

So, what is 'treasure' now?

According to the PAS website, treasure is now defined in The Treasure Act 1996. In England, Wales and Northern Ireland, all finders of gold and silver objects, and groups of coins from the same finds, over 300 years old, have a legal obligation to report such items under the Treasure Act 1996. Prehistoric base-metal assemblages found after 1st January 2003, qualify as Treasure, as do finds of metallic objects that are more than 200 years old and which provide exceptional insight into an aspect of



Dr Edward Carswell (right) talking with a member of the audience after his talk *Treasures of Oxfordshire*. Photo Dave Cavanagh

national or local history, archaeology or culture.

The Treasure Act 1996 does not apply in Scotland or the Isle of Man, and the Portable Antiquities Scheme does not operate there.

The Portable Antiquities Scheme is run by the British Museum and Amgueddfa Cymru (Museum Wales) to encourage the recording of archaeological objects found by members of the public in England and Wales. Every year many thousands of archaeological objects are discovered, many of these by metal detector users, but also by people whilst out walking, gardening or going about their daily work. Finds recorded with the Scheme help advance knowledge of the history and archaeology of England and Wales.

On the finds.org.uk homepage is a search box. You might want to search for particular types of antiquary e.g. coins, axe heads, or search for anything that has been found in your parish. I searched for 'Uffington' and the system came up with a number of finds.

You do not have to register to use the Portable Antiquaries Scheme for simple searches.



Search our database

Try coin for example



Vale Path Volunteers

Part of a clearance in Southmoor parish by the Vale Path Volunteers. Here excellent steps at the side of the A420 had been virtually obscured by overhanging trees. Our leader, Pat, presents us with chocolate Hobnobs at break time. Photos Dave Cavanagh



One of the Vale Path Volunteers flying squads, a small team for a small(ish) job, here in Grove parish, replacing an old waymark with a new one. Photo Andy Body, using his remotely operated camera.

Our next walks



**Thursday, 7th September, HG -
Wooburn Wanderer, 14mi / 22.5km**



**Thursday, 7th September, DW -
Dorchester circular via Shillingford
Bridge, 7mi / 11.3km**



**Thursday, 7th September, TW -
Piddington, Bledlow Ridge & West
Wycombe Hill, 8mi / 12.9km**



**Thursday, 7th September, V-A
circular walk from Faringdon**

CANCELLED, 6.2mi / 10km



**Thursday, 7th September, BNO -
King's Sutton, 3mi / 4.8km**



**Saturday, 9th September, V-A
circuit of the Baldons CANCELLED;**

5mi / 8km



**Saturday, 9th September, BNO -
Duns Tew Trot, 7mi / 11.3km**

A few years ago Vale Group had a six-mile walk starting on the Ridgeway above East Hendred, descending to the Vale, then back up again. The temperature quickly rose to the high 20s. We felt it, got through our water supplies, and were glad that the walk hadn't been any longer. Consequently the leader of a 12-mile Vale Group walk planned for a day or two later when a 30C temperature was forecast cut the walk by half.

Shortly after that the Vale Group committee decided that in the interests of safety, not least that of a walk leader, Vale Group walks would be cancelled if a temperature of about 30C was forecast on the day of one its walks. This removed any pressure that a leader might feel to lead a walk regardless of heat, and would prevent anybody else who might have gone on the walk from suffering heat stress and/or dehydration. So it was that Vale Group cancelled two of its walks during the unprecedented heatwave of early September.

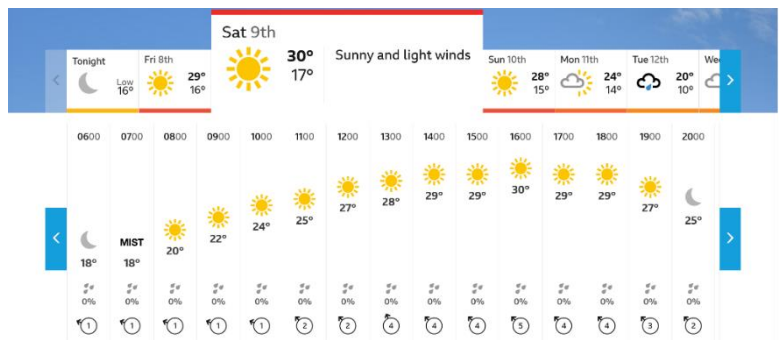
Topsy turvy weather this summer

June this year was the hottest June on record for the UK. It beat the previous record by nearly a degree. Each nation of the UK experienced this.

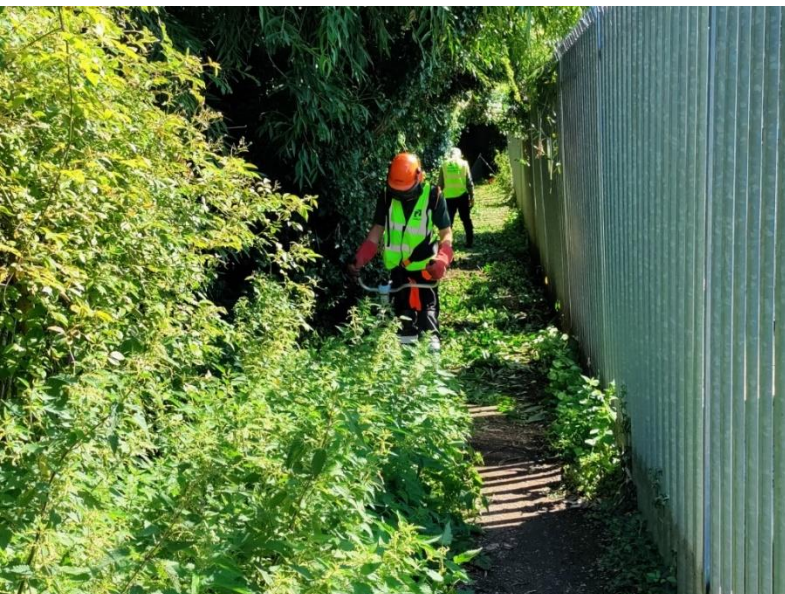
Then July became the sixth wettest July on record in England as a whole.

Following on from that, August, as I recall, was largely a disappointment. Lots of days in the early part of the month were nice when the sun was out but turned chilly when clouds got in the way, due to the breeze coming from a northerly quarter for a substantial period.

Technically September is not a summer month but the beginning of the month can't go without mention. We had seven consecutive days when the temperature reached 30C or more somewhere in the UK.



"I love Jane Austen because I never read her but I'm glad she exists." Italo Calvino, writer.



Here the Vale Path Volunteers cleared an urban path in Wantage. Over half a dozen people, plus dogs, went past us. It's always satisfying when they thank us. Photos Dave Cavanagh

Two of the latest footbridge replacements by Oxfordshire County Council's Countryside Access Delivery Team



Oxfordshire Countryside Access
18 August at 11:19 · 🌐

Replacement bridge within Cuddesdon and Denton parish. Grateful to the landowner for allowing us to drive across their field once the crop had been harvested.

[Cuddesdon and Denton Community News](#)
[#Footpath](#) [#Bridge](#)





Oxfordshire Countryside Access
17 August at 09:07 · 🌐

Replacement footbridge on Garsington Footpath 25

[#Bridge](#) [#Footpath](#)

Two side-by-side photographs of a newly installed wooden footbridge. The left photo shows the bridge from a side angle, partially obscured by tall green grass and weeds. The right photo shows the bridge from a front-facing perspective, revealing its construction of wooden planks and railings. The bridge spans a small ditch in a field of harvested crops under a blue sky with scattered clouds.