



Helen Pighills, Mayor of Abingdon-on-Thames cuts a cake to open The Vale Way, a new local trail.

(Photo D Cavanagh)

The Vale Way - A New Trail in the Vale

The Vale Way, a 27 mile long trail linking the market towns of Abingdon, Wantage and Faringdon, was launched to the public in Abingdon on Friday 3rd July. The Mayor of Abingdon on Thames, Cllr Helen Pighills, cut a cake, unveiled a map of the route and joined us on a walk to one end of the way in Abbey Meadows.

The route starts in Abingdon, at the junction with the Thames path, then continues along the Sustrans path, Milton, Steventon, West Hendred, Ardington, Wantage, the Wilts and Berks canal, the Challows, Stanford in the Vale, Hatford, Folly Hill, Faringdon, Little Coxwell and ends in Longcot at the junction with the D'Arcy Dalton Way.

The route and instructions can be viewed at:

<http://www.ramblers-oxon.org.uk/thevaleway/valeway.htm>

There will be walks covering the Vale Way in the winter programme, October and November, that cover the whole route in 7 short sections or 2 longer walks. Please come and join us as we walk The Vale Way.

The Vale Way team: Peter Skuse, Stuart Hughes, Jim Parke, John Gordon

Summer 2015 Awayday Walk

This year's awayday walk took place on the Marlborough Downs. The walk was chosen from a Ramblers publication, 'Ramblers Best Walks: Britain' and led by Peter Skuse.

Starting near Alton Barnes 14 members walked up onto the downs first climbing the aptly named Walkers' Hill where fantastic views across to Salisbury Plain could be seen. The weather was to stay warm and clear for the whole walk. Next we came across one of Wiltshire's many white horses, the Alton Barnes horse.

Next was Milk Hill, the highest point in Wiltshire from where we could just about see 2 other white horses at Pewsey and Devizes. Then we walked along a stretch of The Wansdyke, a 60 mile earthwork across the downs. After a short stop near Tan Hill we descended via Cliffords Hill, where we watched para gliding, past a recently created cemetery built as a Neolithic long barrow to the village of All Cannings for lunch.

After a leisurely rest, suitably recharged we walked along the Kennet and Avon canal to Honeystreet for a cup of tea at a café on the canal. We returned to the start through the village of Alton Barnes where we had to pass through interesting 'turnstile' stiles. The views were magnificent throughout and complemented by numerous points of interest. A really good walk was had by all.



Stanford-in-the-Vale Parish Church, on The Vale Way

Photo J Gordon

Parish Path Wardens

There are 69 parishes in the Vale of White Horse. At present 53 of these parishes, (77%) have a Parish Path Warden (PPW) in place. This is an increase from 54% recorded at the same time last year. In April this year I sent an email to the Parish Clerks of those parishes still without a PPW, with an attached poster asking for volunteers to come forward. As a result we were fortunate to recruit several more PPWs.

The main role of a PPW is to walk a parish's footpaths at least twice a year, carrying a pair of secateurs to clip away vegetation obstructing the footpath, usually at stiles, bridges or gates where the farmers' mechanical hedgerow cutters cannot reach. If any serious problem is noticed, such as a bridge in bad repair or a tree which has fallen across the path, then is the job of the PPW to report this immediately to the County Council Countryside Access Team's Acting Field Officer for the area, (Arthur McEwan-James). Less serious problems are noted and sent in batches, twice a year, via one of the four PPW Rambler Local Coordinators in the Vale. Every PPW has a large scale 1:10,000 map of his/her parish which shows in detail all the footpaths with their reference numbers.

A free one-day workshop of PPWs has been arranged on Saturday September 19th at Weston-on-the-Green Village Hall. Please contact me if you are interested in attending.

Here follows a list of those parishes in the Vale which do not yet have a PPW:

Baulking, Buscot, Coleshill, Denchworth, Drayton, Eaton Hastings, Goosey, Great Coxwell, Hatford, Kingston Bagpuize with Southmoor, Little Coxwell, Sparsholt, Steventon, Watchfield, Woolstone.

If any Rambler lives in, or close to, one these parishes and would like to volunteer to be the Parish Path Warden, please contact me and I will send further information.

Jim Parke. jmh.parke@btinternet.com or 01865 730664



Old turnstiles in Alton Barnes *Photo J Gordon*

Vale Path Volunteers

The Vale Path Volunteers will resume their activities in September. Nine sites have been identified for the Autumn programme of path clearance. These sites range from Cumnor, Drayton and Abingdon in the east of the Vale to Baulking, Faringdon and Littleworth to the west. Some of the sites were suggested by Arthur McEwan-James the Acting County Field Officer who covers the Vale District. Arthur replaced Mark Sumner who left the County Council's service in July. Other sites were recommended by Parish Path Wardens. If on any rambles in the Vale you should walk along a footpath which you consider requires a degree of path clearance, please get in touch with me.

Two volunteers have joined the team during the summer: Graham Lawes and Colin Galloway who both live in Abingdon, bringing the team's number up to 15. Earlier in the year the team were successful in securing a grant from the Ramblers Holiday Charitable Fund which was used to purchase a brushcutter/trimmer. This petrol-engined machine will greatly assist the team's work as it will be possible to trim grass much more quickly and cut away tougher vegetation as brambles and blackthorn bushes. The grant also covered the cost of training two of our members, Dave Cavanagh and John Gordon, to use the brushcutter. They obtained their LANTRA (National Training Organisation for the Land Based Industries) certificates and are qualified to use the machine properly and safely. This training was necessary in order to satisfy the Insurance conditions for the team required by the County Council and the Ramblers.

If any Rambler member is interested in helping out on path maintenance I would be pleased to hear from them.

Jim Parke jmh.parke@btinternet.com or 01865 730664



Some of the Vale Ramblers on the awayday trip to the Wiltshire Downs.

Photo P Skuse.

The Chairman's Ramblings

The Vale Group **Annual General Meeting** will be held in The Thomas Hughes Memorial Hall in Uffington on Saturday 31st October. There will be a walk in the morning, a light lunch provided in the hall and the AGM starting at 2pm, followed by a talk on the Wilts and Berks Canal. Tom Brown's School Museum in the village will be open to visit until 5pm to round off a pleasant day. Please come along and let us know what you think of the group, our walks and other activities. Without feedback your committee can sometimes be working in the dark.

Have you signed up for **The Big Pathwatch** yet? All you do is walk all the public paths in a kilometre square and note any problems or good features. Go to the Ramblers website <http://www.ramblers.org.uk> and click on the big pathwatch link for details. There you can see which squares have already been surveyed and claim free ones. If you have a smartphone or tablet it is really easy but you can do it on your home computer too. If you don't have a computer, give me a ring and I'll find some squares for you to try. The idea behind this is not just to get ramblers surveying paths but to involve as many people as possible. Why not get your friends involved? Or any other club where the members can get outside for the shortest of walks. This will all make people aware of the delights and benefits of walking and the importance of the path network for that.



Have you tried **Walks Finder** recently? It has improved a lot since the first prototype. Take a look at <http://www.ramblers.org.uk/go-walking.aspx> enter a location, postcode, village, etc and click Search. The map that comes up shows you the start points of all walks within 25 miles of the location within the next two months. You can refine the search in many ways: date range; distance from location, length of walk. Two good features which might not immediately be apparent are: (a) it shows you walks by all groups, not just Oxfordshire so are alerted to other groups walking near you; (b) the brown markers show routes not walks - i.e. not organised walks but descriptions of routes you can download and walk yourself. As well as giving you ideas for walking on your own these Ramblers Routes would also make good choices to volunteer for the Vale Group walks programme. Actually there are not any in the Vale so if anyone has a favourite walk and would like help adding it to these routes, get in touch.

I often hear in Walk magazine and other places that there is a large demand for shorter gentler walks both from members who can't walk as far these days and from the wider public. Our current leaders and active walkers seem to set a lower limit of about five miles and don't seem to think it worth leading or walking anything shorter. If there are any former walks leaders reading this who no longer feel up to longer walks but can still manage 3 or 4 miles at a slow pace then please get in touch and we will organise some walks to test the market. Some other Oxfordshire groups have tried this and been surprised by the demand.



Interested in improving the approach routes to the Ridgeway?

I represent Ramblers nationally on the new Ridgeway Partnership that is responsible for maintaining and developing the Ridgeway – and its environmental corridor. The latter includes the rights of way that lead to the Ridgeway (the approach paths). If some of these are in poor condition e.g. decrepit stiles or overgrowth, then we can seek to get them improved as a priority. First we need to know the state of each approach route. If you would be interested in checking-out some of them, no matter how few, please let me know.

Dave Cavanagh davecavanagh1000@gmail.com

As well as this paper newsletter, the Vale Group and Oxfordshire Area circulate news items by email. This includes notice of extra walks and cancellations. Sign up to our email list by mailing patlon@ntlworld.com

Report footpath problems at
<http://www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/cms/content/report-problem-public-right-way>

Request for Walk Leaders

The winter programme of Vale walks has been published and is varied in its offering of regular Thursday walks, mince pie walks, weekend walks, a history walk and walks along the Vale's new trail, The Vale Way.

To continue to offer the programme, or indeed grow it, we need members to volunteer to lead walks. We would particularly like to hear from members in the Faringdon and west Vale area or Abingdon and east Vale to volunteer to lead walks locally.

For further information please contact Peter Skuse, Walks Organiser

Dates for your Diary

Saturday, October 31st	Vale Group AGM, Uffington. 1000 walk, 1230 lunch, 1400 AGM followed by talk on Wilts and Berks Canal.
Various dates in December	Vale Mince Pie Walks - see programme or Walks Finder
Saturday January 23rd	Oxfordshire Area Ramblers AGM Begbroke

Your Vale Group Committee

Chairman	John Gordon
General Secretary	Vacancy
Treasurer	Joan Wyatt
Membership	Pat Lonergan
Walks	Peter Skuse
Footpaths	Dave Cavanagh
Publicity	Jim Parke
Countryside	Vacancy
Ordinary Members	Bob Evans, Christine Tunna

Navigation, Walk Planning & Leadership Course

We plan to hold this course again in 2015. It covers the basics of map reading, planning and leading a walk. The aim is to give you knowledge and confidence to lead a ramblers walk but many of the skills learned can equally well be applied to walking on your own.

The course will be held in Abingdon on 7th and 8th October in the evening and an outdoor session on Boars Hill on Saturday 10th. There is no charge to attend the course.

To book a place, complete the form and send to J Gordon, 3 Lydsee Gate, Wantage, OX12 9XY.

Or phone John on 07968 710869 or email him at valeramblers@gmail.com

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Please reserve me a place on the Leadership Navigation & Planning Course, Autumn 2015.

Name:

Telephone and/or email:

Address:

Send completed form to: John Gordon, 3 Lydsee Gate, Wantage, OX12 9XY or email as above.