



Stiles and footbridge on Pill Ditch in Grove, replaced by gates and a new footbridge

(Photos: D Cavanagh)

In previous newsletters, Dave Cavanagh told us about his attempts to improve the walking experience around Grove. How, together with the Parish Council and the Wilts & Berks Canal Trust, he applied for a toe² grant to replace old stiles and bridges. In total the project has delivered: 16 gates (mostly kissing gates); 13 of which replaced stiles; 3 footbridges; and 2 stiles removed to form gaps.

The installation work was done last autumn and I led the Wantage Mince Pie walk around it in December. I am also leading a short 3 mile walk from Millbrook Square, Grove along the canal and Pill Ditch on Sunday 3rd May.

I'm not trying to take credit for Dave's work, I just live closer now that he has moved to Uffington where he is having a similar impact on the path network.

Summer 2015 Walks Programme

There is an average of two walks per week in our varied summer programme. As well as our regular Thursday walks we have a joint mini-programme with the West Oxfordshire group to provide shorter walks from Witney and Eynsham on the third Tuesday of the month. Do come and enjoy them. We have changed the format of the first Thursday walks to include walks from places other than Faringdon in the west Vale. All walks start from convenient places on the Stagecoach, Oxford to Swindon No 66 bus route, and have been called 'ROUTE66' walks. It is intended to have more walks on this route in future.

Our summer away day on the 27th June is again selected from a Ramblers publication and starts from Milk Hill on the Marlborough Downs. There are great views, a white horse, an award winning pub, tea room and lovely countryside. There is also a spring social with a walk, 80th anniversary walks on 2-3 May, Area picnic and walk, and we are again entertaining the London Blind walkers group. We hope the weather is good so we can enjoy our programme. Thanks to all the leaders who have volunteered to lead walks for us.

Peter Skuse, Walks Organiser

The Vale Way - A New Trail

The Vale Ramblers are planning a new trail in the Vale of White Horse. The Vale Way is 27 miles long and is intended to give walkers an interesting route between the market towns of Faringdon, Wantage and Abingdon.

From Longcot on the D'Arcy Dalton way in the west the route passes the source of the river Ock, Faringdon, Stanford-in-the-Vale, along a part of the Wilts and Berks canal, Wantage, Ardington, Steventon, Milton to Abingdon ending on the Oxford Greenbelt Way/ Thames Path. It is hoped to make the Way available publicly in July as part of the Ramblers 80th anniversary celebrations.

To find out more come to our spring social in Wootton on 18th April.

Peter Skuse, Stuart Hughes and Jim Parke.

Report footpath problems at

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

Parish Path Wardens

There has been a steady expansion of the Parish path warden network in the Vale this year with a number of volunteers coming forward. Of the 70 parishes in the Vale 44, or 63%, now have a PPW in place. There is therefore still a need for some more volunteers, particularly those living in the western fringes of the Vale. This year, contact will be made with the Parish Clerks of those parishes with a request that posters be up on parish notice boards asking for PPW volunteers to come forward.

Two initiatives taken by the Countryside Access Team this year has been of great benefit to the process. PPWs have now received large scale maps of their parishes which show the location and number of all the Public Rights of Way. These have proved extremely useful when PPWs are out walking the paths in their parish. The Countryside Access Team has also revised and improved the lists of the unresolved problems of each parish, thus making it easier for the PPW to check whether or not an unresolved problem has been, in fact, resolved by the farmer/landowner but the County Field Officer has not been informed. The PPW is also able to report serious problems directly to the County Field Officer, thus alerting him to those problems which require his immediate attention.

A one day PPW workshop was held at East Hanney Village Hall in September attended by a number of Vale PPWs. The practical session in the afternoon was led by Mark Sumner, the County Field Officer for the Vale. This session involves walking a number of paths in the locality and checking the path infrastructure.

A key element in the development of the PPW programme in the Vale this year has been the appointment of local co-ordinators. I am most grateful to Dave Cavanagh, John Gordon and John Orchard agreeing to act as local co-ordinators with me. A local co-ordinator manages a team of around a dozen PPWs. The main role of a local co-ordinator is to collate the twice yearly reports (in January and July) which the PPWs in his team send to him listing any



OCC CAT Footpath Officer for the Vale, Mark Sumner, describes footbridge replacement on the PPW Workshop at Hanney last September.

(Photo JMH Parke)

new, less-urgent problems, in the parish. The local co-ordinator then sends the collated list in one batch to Mark Sumner. In this way Mark is not constantly receiving a stream of reports throughout the year. At any one time there are about 500 outstanding unresolved reports on the path network in the Vale.

If any member wishes to volunteer to be a PPW or requires information please contact me for details.

Jim Parke PPW Network Administrator

Contact: jmh.parke@btinternet.com

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 01235 763667 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.



Mary Barber, long-time member of the Vale Group, died peacefully near her family in Yorkshire in November. On the day of her funeral some of her rambling friends got together on the Ridgeway to remember her.

(Photos: A Bell, E Steane)

The Chairman's Ramblings

At the **AGM** at Sutton Courtenay in November a new committee was elected. We said goodbye and thank you to Rona Bingham and John Orchard who retired from your committee. Their roles as Membership Secretary and Footpath Secretary were taken on by Pat Lonergan and Dave Cavanagh. We also welcomed Christine Tunna onto the committee.

The Ramblers **Big Pathwatch** is an project to survey every right of way in England and Wales on the OS map. It will take place this summer and should produce a list of path problems to target as well as producing useful statistics to use for campaigning and influencing,

You will have seen in the article on the summer programme that we are helping **West Oxfordshire Group** get some shorter walks into their programme. I encourage you to venture across the river and join in the shorter Vale and West Oxon walk in Witney and Eynsham.

Have you tried the new **Ramblers Walks Finder**? See it at <http://www.ramblers.org.uk/go-walking/find-a-walk-or-route.aspx> It lets you search for walks in a variety of ways: length, location, time period, type, group; and presents the results on a map. This has several advantages including finding convenient walks when you don't know the names of every Oxfordshire village and seeing when other groups or areas are walking near you. We can also tag our walks with themes such as the Mince Pie walks and easily produce lists of them to help with publicity. If you would like to produce a list of Ramblers walks within a certain distance of your town or village and turn it into a poster for your village hall, give it a try. I am happy to advise.

I hope some of you can make it to our walk on Sunday 23rd August when the **London Blind Ramblers** visit. This is always a good event but it needs enough of our members to attend as well. If you can walk with our visitors, or give a lift from the station, or bake a cake for the tea, get in touch with Pat Lonergan patlon@ntlworld.com

Vale Path Volunteers

The Vale Path Volunteers have been relatively inactive this winter. Our main focus has been on obtaining a brushcutter so that we can undertake bigger jobs. With grants from The Ramblers and Ramblers Holidays Pathwork Fund we have just purchased a Stihl FS410C brushcutter with a shredder blade which is capable of tackling brambles and other thick growth. John Gordon and Dave Cavanagh have taken LANTRA training in its use and we have also purchased the necessary safety equipment. Now we just have to identify suitable sites. We have some in mind but if you are aware of any rights of way in need of clearance please let me know.

Jim Parke
jmh.parke@btinternet.com

Vale Walks Pocket-Sized Reminder

APRIL

Thu 2nd 10:35 6.3 mi. Faringdon, Market Place .
 Thu 9th 10:30 6 mi. Abingdon, Market Place.
 Sat 11th 10:00 10 mi. Sparsholt, junction near The Star
 Thu 16th 10:30 5.5 mi. Wantage, Bear Hotel, Market Place.
 Sat 18th 14:00 5 mi. Wootton & Dry Sandford, Hall.
 Thu 23rd 10:30 8 mi. Abingdon, Market Place.
 Sat 25th 09:00 12 mi. Lower Slaughter, Copsehill Road,
 Thu 30th 10:00 8.5 mi. Abingdon, Market Place.

MAY

Sat 2nd 10:00 5 mi. South Hinksey, General Elliott PH.
 Sun 3rd 14:00 3 mi. Grove, Millbrook Square.
 Thu 7th 10:35 6 mi. Faringdon, Market Place .
 Thu 14th 10:30 6.5 mi. Abingdon, Market Place.
 Sat 16th 10:00 10 mi. Ramsden, the church.
 Thu 21st 10:00 7.5 mi. Wantage, Bear Hotel, Market Place
 Sat 23rd 10:00 8.5 mi. West Ilsley, the pond.
 Thu 28th 10:30 8 mi. Abingdon, Market Place.
 Sat 30th 09:00 10.5 mi. Aston Rowant, Nature Reserve.

JUNE

Thu 4th 10:35 8 mi. Faringdon, Market Place .
 Thu 11th 10:30 4 mi. Abingdon, Market Place.
 Sat 13th 10:15 9 mi. Ashdown Park, NT car park.
 Thu 18th 10:30 5.5 mi. Wantage, Bear Hotel, Market Place.
 Sat 20th 09:30 9.9 mi. Aston Rowant, Nature Reserve.
 Thu 25th 10:30 10 mi. Abingdon, Market Place.
 Sat 27th 10:00 10.5 mi. Awayday

JULY

Thu 2nd 10:30 5 mi. Buckland, The Lamb PH.
 Sat 4th 10:00 12 mi. Bishopstone, the pond.
 Thu 9th 10:25 6 mi. Abingdon, Market Place.
 Sat 11th 09:30 8.5 mi. Woolstone Hill, NT car park.
 Thu 16th 10:30 5 mi. Wantage, Bear Hotel, Market Place.
 Sat 18th 10:00 7 mi. Wickham, Primary School .
 Tues 21st 10:30 6.5 mi. Witney, Market Square, opp Blue Boar
 Thu 23rd 10:30 7.5 mi. Abingdon, Market Place.
 Sat 25th 10:15 11 mi. Ardington, opp Loyd Lindsay Rooms.
 Thu 30th 10:00 6.5 mi. Baulking, the church.

AUGUST

Sat 1st 10:00 11 mi. Abingdon, Market Place.
 Thu 6th 10:35 9.4 mi. Faringdon, Market Place .
 Sat 8th 10:00 10.5 mi. Aston Upthorpe, village hall.
 Thu 13th 10:30 4.5 mi. Abingdon, Market Place.
 Tues 18th 10:30 6 mi. Witney, Market Square, Blue Boar
 Thu 20th 10:30 5.5 mi. Wantage, Bear Hotel, Market Place.
 Sun 23rd 11:00 5 mi. Chilton, South Row, 'Wayland'.
 Thu 27th 10:30 7.5 mi. Abingdon, Market Place.

SEPTEMBER

Tues 1st 10:15 6 mi. Cumnor, Eaton circular.
 Thu 3rd 10:20 8 mi. Shrivenham, High Street, Church Walk.
 Sat 5th 09:00 11.8 mi. Wootton, car park opposite church.
 Thu 10th 10:30 6.5 mi. Abingdon, Market Place.
 Sat 12th 10:00 8.5 mi. Harwell, the church.
 Tues 15th 10:30 5 mi. Witney, Market Square, opp Blue Boar
 Thu 17th 10:30 5.5 mi. Wantage, Bear Hotel, Market Place.
 Thu 24th 10:30 8 mi. Abingdon, Market Place.
 Sat 26th 09:30 7.5 mi. Besselsleigh, Greyhound PH.

Cut-out and keep



Footpath along the W&B Canal at Childrey Wharf (Photo: J Gordon)

Dates for your Diary

Saturday, April 18th	Spring Social. Wootton & Dry Sandford Community Centre. A walk round local nature reserves followed by a cream tea and a talk
Saturday May 2nd.	Ramblers 80th Anniversary walks. A History Walk with Bob Evans. General Elliot PH in South Hinksey
Sunday May 3rd	Ramblers 80th Anniversary walks. The Wilts and Berks Canal and Pill Ditch from Grove
Saturday June 20th	Area Picnic at Shirburn Hill. Vale walk from Aston Rowant Nature Reserve
Saturday June 27th	AwayDay to Wiltshire Downs
Sunday August 23rd	Visit from London Blind Ramblers. Pickup Didcot Station, walk from Chilton
Sunday/ Monday August 30/31	White Horse Show, Fawley near Uffington

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

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