



Above—Awayday walkers at the Nymphsfield Long Barrow on the Cotswold Way (Photo: J Gordon,)

Below The view from Selsley Common (Photo: P Skuse)

## A Summer Awayday

Members from all parts of the Vale travelled to Coaley Peak near Stroud, Gloucestershire, for the summer awayday walk. Sixteen walkers met at the Coaley Peak picnic area and took advantage of the opportunity to see the superb views across the river Severn towards Wales, the Forest of Dean and the Malverns. The walk was chosen from the Ramblers book; Walk Britain - Great Views and was 10.5 miles long.

The route took in Selsley Common, Selsley for lunch, back up to the common, then south through great Cotswold country to Inchbrook and the Woodchester Estate, with tea at Woodchester Hall.

The book described the views as, from Coaley Peak, 'offers one of Britains best views' and 'few can hold a candle to the one from' Selsley Common. In this we were not disappointed, the weather making the views spectacular. The wild flowers and orchids on Selsley Common added to the spectacle. Of particular interest were five different sorts of orchids that were seen.

Altogether a splendid day out. The views from Coaley



Peak and Selsley Common are well worth travelling for even if you don't do all the walk. We will certainly be considering another walk from the book for next year.

*Peter Skuse  
Walks Organiser*

# Parish Path Wardens

Over the past two years, the Oxfordshire Area Ramblers and the Oxford Fieldpaths Society, working in partnership with the Countryside Access Team of Oxfordshire County Council, have been active in setting up a network of volunteer Parish Path Wardens throughout the County.

We have 69 parishes in the Vale of White Horse. Three years ago only a handful of our parishes reported the equivalent of a PPW in place. Seeking to address this state of affairs we sent out letters and posters asking Parish Clerks to pin these on their Parish Notice boards inviting people to volunteer to become a PPW. All Rambler Newsletters included articles seeking volunteers. Parishes without a PPW were listed on the Oxfordshire Area Ramblers website so that members could see where there was still a need for a volunteer.

The response was encouraging so in May 2013 we organised a pilot Day Workshop to take place at Wroxton Village Hall, near Banbury. Building on the success of our first workshop, similar Workshop Days were held at Horspath on October 5<sup>th</sup>, Eynsham on October 26<sup>th</sup> and Tiddington in March of this year. We devoted the morning session to short talks on how to access the County's PRow Definitive Map and Statement, and how to use the online Interactive Map. Then came a talk from a County Field Officer about his/her responsibilities, and a discussion of the PPW Guidelines. The afternoon consisted of a practical session - a short circular walk led by the County Field Officer to demonstrate some of the typical footpath issues. Our four workshops have attracted more than 50 participants and we are encouraging all Vale PPWs to attend the next workshop which is scheduled for **Saturday September 20<sup>th</sup> at East Hanney Village Memorial Hall.**

The Countryside Access Team has produced large scale (1:10,000) maps for every single parish, showing the number and the location of each Public Right of Way. This is a valuable reference aid for our PPWs. Maps have now been distributed to eve-

ry PPW in the county. The format of the list of unresolved footpath problems for each parish has been modified to make it more user-friendly. We have also amended the Guidelines so that PPWs have a clear understanding of how problems should be reported and checked.

In the Vale the latest development has been the establishment of four local PPW co-ordinators. I am very grateful to Dave Cavanagh, John Gordon and John Orchard who have volunteered to join me as local PPW co-ordinators, each of us having a group of up to 10 PPWs. Groups are based geographically throughout the Vale. The role of the local co-ordinator is to collate the less-urgent problem reports from his team, which will be sent in twice-yearly to Mark Sumner, the County Field Officer for the Vale.

Recently we received a request from the Countryside Access Team to survey a number of 'Promoted Walks' throughout the county, details of which can be found on the Team's website. Here in the Vale there are promoted walks based in Faringdon, Wantage and Eynsham. In these parishes we have asked PPWs to undertake a survey of the route and also to check that maps and descriptions are accurate. A similar exercise has been undertaken on the Oxfordshire Way which stretches for 67 miles from the west of the County, traversing some 36 parishes before reaching Henley-on-Thames in the south. The PPWs of those parishes through which the Oxfordshire Way runs have been asked to check the accuracy of the description and to identify any problems found on the route.

About 75% of Oxfordshire's parishes have a PPW in place. In the Vale the comparable figure is 54%. We are, therefore, asking for volunteers to look after parishes - mainly in the west of the Vale - where there is currently no PPW.

**If any Vale Rambler wishes to have more information about the role of a PPW please contact me. [jmh.parke@btinternet.com](mailto:jmh.parke@btinternet.com).**

## Navigation, Walk Planning & Leadership Course

We plan to hold this course again this autumn. 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 at the Guildhall in central Abingdon on 7th and 8th October in the evening and an outdoor session on Boars Hill on Saturday 11th. 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](mailto:valeramblers@gmail.com)

-----> cut here <-----

Please reserve me a place on the Leadership Navigation & Planning Course, Autumn 2014,

Name:

Telephone and/or email:

Address:

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



*Before and After views of VPV work on a urban path in Faringdon and a footpath between West Hendred and Ginge.*

*Photos: (J Parke)*

## **Vale Path Volunteers**

This year the Vale Path Volunteers team have been at work on a number of sites. Following a request from Jane Archer, one of our Vale Rambler members, the team cleared a particularly dense thicket of brambles on an important path in West Hendred Parish which gives access to the path that runs up the Ginge Valley. The team has also worked on a section of the d'Arcy Dalton Way in the parish of Woolstone. Following a discussion with Mark Sumner, (County Field Officer for the Vale), the landowner had agreed to use his mechanical mower to clear an overgrown footpath along the sides of the fields in order to create a wide, walkable track. When this was completed the team cleared away a very overgrown hedgerow which was partly blocking a footbridge.

Then at a later date Marcus Laphorne (VPV member) advised the team that a footpath in Faringdon needed some major clearance. This footpath is an important link to the town centre and its width had been effectively halved by the growth of brier brambles on one side. This task has taken three sessions because of the work involved in taking away the large amount of cut material to a local waste disposal dump. On the second session there was some good publicity in the local press and the team was generously invited by a nearby businessman for a coffee break with refreshments.

The team has been successful in obtaining a grant from the Ramblers Holidays Charitable Trust Volunteer Fund. This will be used to purchase a petrol-engined brushcutter. A brushcutter will considerably enhance the scope of the team's work and increase output. Two members, Dave Cavanagh and John Gordon, have undertaken the necessary training to operate the brushcutter and it is hoped that projects in the Autumn period will see the machine in action.

If any Vale Ramblers are interested in joining the Vale Path Volunteers to help with footpath maintenance projects, please do get in touch.

*Jim Parke*  
[jim.parke@btinternet.com](mailto:jim.parke@btinternet.com)

## Footpath News

This is my last article as Footpath Secretary and I must say I have enjoyed my 10 years tenure in that office. The Vale as a whole is not in bad shape with regard to footpaths, the majority being relatively easy to find and walk. There are obviously exceptions, but I believe the current system of Parish Path Wardens will be of enormous benefit in keeping a close eye on the network and spotting problems early. This does not mean that any urgent problems you spot do not need reporting.

The current problem which applies to almost all rights of way is the rapid growth of vegetation due to the prior wet conditions and the present hot spell. Just keep carrying secateurs when you are out and about and this can be kept under reasonable control.

On other matters, the current path diversions proposed in our area are:-

- Baulking FP5 and FP6, this has been now resolved to the benefit of all parties and will be progressed.
- Uffington FP4, this was unilaterally closed by network rail on health and safety grounds, but I am pleased to report that they now intend to build a bridge at that crossing and that proposal has received universal acceptance.

I shall not be standing again as footpath secretary for the Vale. Subject to the decision of the AGM, Dave Cavanagh will be my replacement, I wish him all the best, but will not be completely leaving the footpath arena as I am one of the Vale PPW Co-ordinators.

I wish the Vale Group continuing success in all its ventures.

*John Orchard, Footpaths Secretary  
Telephone 01235 530489  
e-mail [jcandmjorchard@btinternet.com](mailto:jcandmjorchard@btinternet.com)*

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

### Dates for your Diary

|                         |                                                      |
|-------------------------|------------------------------------------------------|
| September 20th          | Parish Path Wardens Workshop, East Hanney            |
| October 7,8,11th        | Navigation, Planning and Leadership Course, Abingdon |
| Sat, November 29th      | Vale Group AGM, Sutton Courtenay                     |
| Sat, January 24th, 2015 | Oxfordshire Area AGM, Upper Heyford                  |

## The Chairman's Ramblings

Earlier this year, one of our volunteers, Michael Bloom approached me with his concerns about cyclists on the Thames Path between Kennington and Culham. Unlike some other parts of the Thames Path, this stretch is a footpath and there is a Sus-Trans cycling route nearby. Apart from the inconvenience of tyres churning up the surface of the path, it is narrow in many places and he had found the aggressive and dangerous behaviour of some cyclists in refusing to slow down or make any allowances for other, legitimate, users of the footpath to be intimidating. So much so that he stopped leading walks along that part of the path.

I talked to other ramblers who walk near Abingdon and they echoed his concerns. As the Thames Path is a National Trail, promoted by the government to encourage walking and tourism I felt that this was unacceptable. I wrote to the local representative of the National Trails Team which looks after the Thames Path and the Ridgeway and they replied offering to put up No Cycling signs. They asked for our advice in siting them and we will work with them this autumn.

I am reporting this not as a great victory - it may have no effect at all - but as encouragement to others to speak out like Michael about issues on footpaths and other rights of way that affect your enjoyment of walking. This includes 'countryside' issues involving land adjacent to r-o-w, or through which they pass, including development.

John Orchard and Rona Bingham are stepping down from the Vale Committee at the AGM. Although we may be lucky in finding replacements there is also room for others, whether it is taking notes at meetings, putting up posters, or managing our web content or Facebook page.

Get in touch if you are interested

*John Gordon*

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](mailto:patlon@ntlworld.com)

### Your Vale Group Committee

|                   |                         |
|-------------------|-------------------------|
| Chairman          | John Gordon             |
| General Secretary | Vacancy                 |
| Treasurer         | Joan Wyatt              |
| Membership        | Rona Bingham (retiring) |
| Walks             | Peter Skuse             |
| Footpaths         | John Orchard (retiring) |
| Publicity         | Jim Parke               |
| Countryside       | Dave Cavanagh           |
| Ordinary Members  | Bob Evans, Pat Lonergan |