



South Chilterns Path Maintenance Volunteers Review of 2017



Chiltern
Society



Who we are

The South Chilterns Path Maintenance Volunteers group (SCPMV), that's just a few of them above, was established in 2004 to help improve access to the Rights of Way in South Oxfordshire, and to add value to the work already being undertaken by Oxfordshire County Council and its Task Team.

The SCPMV group is part of the Chiltern Society's Rights of Way Group and work closely with the three Chiltern Society South Oxfordshire Area Secretaries and their thirty-seven Parish Path Representatives, Oxfordshire CC, the Trust for Oxfordshire's Environment (TOE2), landowners, other walking groups and local companies.

Performance Results for 2017

As the figures below show, this year saw a considerable increase across the two key activities of gate installation and clearance.

This year the number of metal, rather than wooden, kissing gates increased substantially, with the farm and land owners concerned opting for perceived lower ongoing maintenance costs.

Path clearances increased dramatically through

greater use of power tools and planning additional work in parallel with gate installations, the tasks often identified at short notice by reports from Parish Path Representatives direct to Bob Parry, the Clearance Co-Ordinator.

This year we have also been able to provide approximate figures for the wider field of activities that underpin the work days: the major activities within these categories are described in the tables following.

Volunteer's Activity and Output

	2015	2016	2017
Total gates installed	19	27	30
Total waymark posts installed	24	56	50
Total fallen trees cleared	20	15	13
Footpaths & bridleways cleared	11.8 Km	11.1 Km	16.6 Km

Volunteer Hours

Clearance + Waymarking: on-site working plus tools quartermaster's prep	397 hrs	766 hrs	735 hrs
Gate installations: on-site working plus tools quartermaster's prep	584 hrs	1057 hrs	941 hrs
Unspecified gate worksite hours (e.g. ground-work and/or site clearance prep)	498 hrs		
Hours volunteers spent travelling to site (estimated)			500 hrs
Total onsite hours (volunteers + quartermaster)	1479	1823	2138

Off-site Support

Time spent on work planning and scheduling, facilities co-ordination

Time spent on non-workday related SCPMV admin

Time spent by Path Reps (path monitoring & reporting, light clearance)

Total time given by volunteers across all SCPMV activities

2017

1918 hrs

1304 hrs

1924 hrs

7,284 hours

Review of Major Projects planned and completed

Gates

In the Chiltern Society Area 8B, which consists of ten parishes nearest to the Thames, a major twenty-eight gate project was completed. The result was that over 90% of stiles in this area have now been replaced with gates, and in a few cases by gaps.

In Area 7, with sixteen parishes in the north Oxfordshire Chilterns, there are still many stiles on key routes to be replaced. Lewknor footpath 4 was re-established with five gates being installed linking the villages of Postcombe and Copcourt - 're-established' was no exaggeration as the path was blocked in many places. Simultaneously, other volunteers checked other paths in the parish to clarify, delete and remedy some of the many outstanding

issues recorded on the OCC database. Following this, work started on a twelve gate project on the Oxfordshire Way in Shirburn. All these projects were funded by TOE2 grants.

Since 2007, the SCPMV has installed 264 gates in the Oxfordshire Chilterns

Two gates on the Oxfordshire Way in Middle Assendon were funded by the

Long Distance Walkers Association and Oxford Fieldpaths Society; one of these was installed at the end of the year with the other scheduled for early in 2018.

New grants from TOE2 have been awarded for gate projects in Benson and Berrick Salome which are also slated for early 2018, with a further four applications having been submitted for consideration.

Clearance

Working closely with the Oxfordshire CC Field Officer, major clearance work (organised by Bob Parry) was undertaken in Lambridge Wood, just outside Henley on Thames, with reinstatement of paths onto the definitive line and new waymarking. Close by, the volunteers waymarked the National Trust Greys Court Estate Walk with the installation of clearer signage on thirteen new waymark posts.



Operation and Organisation

In addition to the very visible activities of the group – clearance, post and gate installation – it is estimated that over 5,000 hours each year are spent on ‘organisational’ activities which are fundamental to the successful running of the SCPMV. This includes the time spent by Area Secretaries and their path representatives in identifying and following up problems and potential projects, locating and liaising with landowners, and seeking funding when required.

During this year, a primary objective has been to spread organisational and leadership responsibilities for tasks amongst a larger number of volunteers – to ensure that individuals do not become overburdened, to bring in new skills and to provide an even firmer foundation for the group into the future. As a result of this initiative, a number of new Task Leaders (to lead workdays) have come forward, more volunteers are willing and able to tow the tools trailer and several time-consuming administrative jobs have been split up and passed to different volunteers.

SCPMV People

Howard Dell - Facilitator (retirement)

Having taken on the key role of Facilitator in 2009, Howard Dell took the decision to relinquish his post in October 2017 although he continues as an active member of the SCPMV.

As Facilitator, Howard was responsible for reporting and liaising with the Chiltern Society and outside organisations, photography, archiving and maintaining statistical data about the work completed. Howard's commitment to high standards and quality workmanship has been invaluable in achieving an excellent standard of reporting, which has been a significant factor in securing funding from Oxfordshire County Council and in particular the Trust for Oxfordshire's Environment.

In October he and Jonathan Beale (OCC Officer Rights of Way) made a joint presentation at the annual conference of the Institute of Public Rights of Way and Access Management (IPROW). The subject was a close examination of the successful partnership between the self-motivated and self-organised SCPMV with Oxfordshire County Council. Subsequent feedback to IPROW was that the presentation was scored as the most useful at the conference.

Stephen Fox (currently responsible for the gate installation programme) has taken on the Facilitator role on a temporary basis, whilst being shadowed by Steve Feigen who will become the group's new Facilitator during 2018.

Gate Coordinator - Stephen Fox

Stephen plans the forward gate installation programme for a rolling twelve month period, continuously modifying and updating this as situations change and evolve, and new projects need to be added.

This is an extremely time-consuming and complex activity, which needs to take into account TOE project timescales, OCC approval, weather conditions at specific sites, the requirements of the landowner or farmer, the availability of Task Leaders with gate expertise and many other factors.



Clearance Coordinator - Bob Parry

Since taking on the newly created role of Clearance Coordinator, separating the clearance work planning from gates, Bob has radically improved the efficiency of the operation and dramatically increased the amount of clearance work which is achieved.

2017 saw a 50% rise in clearance work compared to the previous year.

In addition, Bob is responsible for waymark post installations, both new and replacements.

Bob works closely with OCC, landowners and farmers, Area Secretaries, and Gate Coordinator Stephen Fox to schedule an efficient workday for all parties with considerations of permissions having been obtained, available task leaders, tools transport logistics, etc.

Timber Quality Control Officer - Vyv James

Over the last three years, Vyv has run a programme of systematically inspecting all wooden gates and waymark posts installed more than five years ago to log and assess the progress of any premature rotting.

In 2017 alone, 40 gates and 180 gate posts were inspected for rot and recorded, with the results

forming a database to help predict gates' lifespan and reliability following post 'sleeving'. Since January 2016, Postsaver sleeves have been fitted to all new wooden gate and waymark posts to provide additional protection to those that have already been treated in accordance with timber treatment BS8417 Part 4.

Tools Maintenance/Quartermasters - Peter Harden, John Lynch

The volunteers require a large variety of tools to install gates and clear footpaths. Clearance tools range from power tools such as hedge trimmers, strimmers, brushcutters and chainsaws and a selection of loppers, shears, and saws, while the gates teams need specialist fencer's digging tools and a large variety of wood and metal working tools.

Most of the tools and all materials are stored in a dedicated, secure barn, which is rented from a local farmer.

These tools are all the responsibility of the Quartermaster (Peter Harden) and the Assistant Quartermaster (John Lynch). Together they ensure that the tools are all in good order, cleaned and maintained, and transported to site on workdays in accordance with the Task Leaders' requirements.



The SCPMV secure tools and materials storage facility

In addition, Peter and John do most of the tools repair and servicing work themselves to keep operational costs to a minimum.

Health & Safety Officer - Jenny Strange

Jenny is responsible for ensuring that all volunteers are familiar with the Chiltern Society's Health and Safety regulations to ensure safety on workdays and to comply with the Society's insurance cover.

She also looks after the provision and upkeep of the first aid boxes carried by the Task Teams on work-

days, and arranges training courses to ensure that a high proportion of the volunteers have current FAWW certificates.

During 2017, five volunteers attended first aid courses, three went on brushcutting training and one took a chainsaw refresher course.

Membership Secretary - Dick Strange

The Membership Secretary maintains the contact list of all members of the SCPMV with details and renewal dates of any proficiency certificates. Data protection confidentiality of records is observed.

Workday Reports written by Team Leaders principally for OCC are circulated to all SCPMV volunteers on

the database – regardless of whether they attended the workday – to ensure that everyone is kept up to date with SCPMV activities and progress.

Dick is also the first point of contact from potential new volunteers enquiring about joining the SCPMV to whom he sends a SCPMV membership information package.

Volunteer Teams Coordinator - Charles Crawcour

Charles assembles workday teams in accordance with Team Leaders' requirements, initially by emailing all the volunteers on the SCPMV database (the 'Call'), then collating the replies to build teams of appropriate size and skills.

A few days before the workday, Charles prepares and emails worksite location maps, work plans and risk assessments. He also prepares the signing-in sheets and updates the attendance spreadsheet.

Finally and importantly, Charles arranges and books the post work pub lunch!



Another Team, another gate!

Stock Controller - Ray Maguire

Ray is the SCPMV Treasurer and is responsible for buying, stock control and organising the storage of all materials required for the gate installation programmes.

He carries out surveys on potential projects to provide accurate costings for TOE2 submissions, liaises with other funding sources, submits reports at

the end of a project and maintains the appropriate records with strict stock control during a multi-gate project's progress.

Ray is also responsible for maintaining the spreadsheet records of the group's work (hours, projects, etc.), and prepares the accounts at the end of the year for OCC and the Chiltern Society.

Gate Team Leaders -

Bob Parry, Howard Dell, Mike Boas, John Lynch, Vyv James, Wim Klauke, Derek Greenwood (retired during the year)

Gate Team Leaders are responsible for managing the gate and clearance workdays. This involves at least one site visit before the scheduled workday to assess what tools will be required, parking, transportation and liaising with the landowner or farmer.

As part of the Risk Assessment, a CAT scanner (a Cable Avoidance Tool provided by OCC) is routinely used before digging begins to check for the possibility of buried cables and pipework.

On the workday, the Team Leader allocates jobs according to skills and individual preferences, ensures the project is completed to OCC and BS Standards and on time, and subsequently produces a report which is sent to OCC, TOE and all volunteers.



And last, but not least, the Gate Instigators, the people who plan the Gate Installation Projects -

Maggie Templeman: also Area Secretary for Chiltern Society South Oxon Area 7

Stephen Fox: also Gate Coordinator and Area Secretary for Chiltern Society South Oxon Area 8a

Alan Futter: also Area Secretary for Chiltern Society South Oxon Area 8b

An account of the Gate Instigator's work in getting a proposal for a stile-free footpath from an idea to the Gate Installation Team can be seen in the SCPMV Annual Review for 2016. Go to: <https://tinyurl.com/y9ox3oqy>

Honour for a Volunteer

Alan Futter

We are delighted to report that one of our three Area Secretaries, Alan Futter, was recognised in the 2018 New Year's Honours with a British Empire Medal for Services to People with Visual Impairments.

The Nomination cited his voluntary work for many

years with the Reading Association for the Blind, and the work he has done with the SCPMV for helping to create stile-free footpaths and stile-free routes which make visually impaired people's countryside walking safer and more enjoyable.



We care for the Chilterns

*The Chiltern Society
South Chilterns Path Maintenance Volunteers
are supported by*



OXFORDSHIRE
COUNTY COUNCIL



The Chiltern Society and the South Chilterns Path Maintenance Volunteers are extremely grateful for the help and support that not only the above organisations give them, but also those Parish Councils, local landowners, farmers and residents who make the task of helping to care for the Chilterns countryside so much easier.



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