



ANNUAL REPORT 2018

CHILTERN SOCIETY SOUTH CHILTERN'S PATH MAINTENANCE VOLUNTEERS

The South Chilterns Path Maintenance Volunteers (SCPMV), part of the Chiltern Society's Rights of Way Group, 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 the County Council and its Task Team. Working closely with the three Chiltern Society South Oxfordshire Area Secretaries and their thirty-seven parish path representatives, Oxfordshire CC, Trust for Oxfordshire Environment (TOE), landowners, other walking groups and local companies, the SCPMV organises three workdays per month to carry out clearance, waymarking and gate installation projects.

**27 gates installed
– and a zigzag!**

**18,175 metres of
path and 38 fallen
trees cleared**

40 waymark posts

**1,628 hours on
site**

**Over 7,000
volunteer hours In
all**

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We care for the Chilterns

SCPMV ACTIVITY IN 2018

2018 was another very active year for the SCPMV, with great support from OCC. We welcomed six new volunteers, losing three, so now have 48 available. While the number of gates was lower than the previous year, clearance (particularly of trees) increased, and it is worth noting that equivalent deliveries in terms of both gates and clearance, were achieved this year with fewer volunteer appearances.

Achievements	2017	2018
wooden kissing gates	17	8
metal kissing gates	8	12
non-kissing gates	5	7
Total Gates Installed – note 1	30	27
zigzags, steps, gate repair	0 7	2 6
Total Other Furniture – note 2	7	8
Waymark Posts Installed	50	40
Trees Cleared – note 3	13	38
Metres Cleared/Mowed – note 4.	16635	18175

Hours Spent By Volunteers	2017	2018
Site and Quartermaster totals in previous reports	1676	1636
Estimated travelling to site	462	416
Estimated planning and prep calculations	1918	1900
Estimated admin	1304	1542
Estimated path reps	1924	1924
Total Volunteer Hours	7284	7418

Funding Split	2017	2018
Gates funded by TOE	23	16
Gates funded by donation	7	11

1. The number of gates was slightly fewer than last year. This may be attributable to less opportunity for 'multi-gate' workdays where more than one gate can be installed on a single day because of their proximity. This was often the case with the Oxfordshire Way project in Shirburn, the majority of which was completed in 2017.
2. Figures relating to path furniture, other than gates, have not previously been reported.
3. There was a significant increase in the number of trees cleared this year, perhaps due to better reporting from the path reps and an increase in qualified chainsaw users?
4. The number of metres cleared also increased. This is in part due to the concentrated effort made in Lambridge Woods with many volunteers working within a relatively small area of woodland.

GATE PROJECTS

In 2018 the SCPMV has installed 26 gates in the Oxfordshire Chilterns, in addition to steps and one zigzag. Highlights for this year:

The twelve-gate project on the Oxfordshire Way in Shirburn was completed in February, and marked by a small celebration at the site of the final kissing gate with cake and English sparkling wine (appropriately enough on 14th February, St. Valentine's Day). This project, also featured in an issue of *Chiltern* magazine, demonstrated the power of partnership between TOE, the landowner, OCC and the volunteers.



Celebrating the final gate at Shirburn

In Berrick Salome, a four-gate project has not only improved access to footpath BS5, but provides an important 'village connection' route. The major bridleway (BS4/WB15a/EW33) known as Hollandtide Bottom and part of the Lower Icknield Way, links the villages of Warborough and Ewelme passing through Berrick Salome and connecting with BS5. In addition, after the fourth stile on BS5, the path joins a 2.5 miles circular route via the Warborough Jubilee Park Permissive Path.

Four stiles were replaced with metal kissing gates on the Chiltern Way Extension (Benson 19 and Nuffield 31). A stated aim of the Chiltern Society and Oxfordshire County Council is to improve access to the Chiltern Way – a promoted and strategic route – and wherever possible to achieve this by replacing existing stiles with gates. This project also provided a challenge in the form of having to rabbit-proof, for the first time, an arable field with the new metal kissing gates. Whilst it had been a reasonably straightforward job for the farmer to protect his crops from rabbits using mesh fencing (sunk to the requisite depth) and spanning the old stiles, the gates were a different matter. The solution,

designed by a member of the SCPMV, involved custom-ordered Centrewire gates with smaller mesh, new closure material between the leaf of the gate and the H-frame, an upstand and an extension flap on the bottom of the gate. To avoid any possibility of trip hazard, a platform was designed with appropriate step caution signs, and a hand rail.

Working with the dedicated Ridgeway Partnership group, the volunteers installed three gates to meet the BS standard for Mobility Access on this strategic promoted national trail.

In Benson, two gates were installed on Benson footpath 2 to provide stile-free access to the allotments, and the first two gates on the Harpsden project were installed, as were two of the three gates on Aston Rowant 5, and one privately donated gate was installed on Watlington footpath 4b.



Volunteers on the repaired steps at Ipsden

Looking to the year ahead, a number of applications have already had funding approved by TOE, including the Oxfordshire Way in Pishill with Stonor, and gates around the dairy farm on the Nettlebed Estate at Bix, which includes a section of the Chiltern Way. Other applications have also been submitted for consideration for Shirburn and Swyncombe.

Clearance and Mowing

Considerable clearance tasks were achieved in conjunction with gate workdays, teams being split between the two types of activity. In addition, one workday per month was allocated purely for clearance projects. 2018 was noteworthy for the trial and use of a large mower and borrowed wheeled trimmers, and as a result the SCPMV has purchased one of the latter.

We also acquired a second chain saw, kindly donated by a PMV member.



Volunteers clearing a path in Ipsden

A highlight of the year was the reopening of Highmoor 10, a previously 'lost' path. This involved researching maps dating from before the Second World War to identify the definitive line. Similarly Nuffield 23 was put back on the definitive line, with a new gap created through a hedge.

Clearance work continued in Lambridge Woods, with some additional waymarking, and the SCPMV entered into a new annual clearance commitment to support the Kingswood Common reclamation team.

In order to facilitate better planning of clearance work going forward, and provide a better experience for walkers, the SCPMV and Area Secretaries have offered to take responsibility for maintaining a number of specific paths (subject to landowner approval). We are awaiting approval for this from OCC.

As another initiative for better managing ROW issues, we have undertaken a trial with OCC in terms of helping to update and clear the backlog of unresolved issues on the CAMs database. OCC has appointed the path rep for Mapledurham, who is also a SCPMV volunteer, as a 'trusted user' allowing him to complement the OCC in keeping the system up to date, something which has proved to be a long-standing problem.

OPERATIONS AND ORGANISATION

In July Jackie Smith was formally appointed to the role of Officer, Public Rights of Way in the Countryside Access team at OCC. This post was previously held, and very actively carried out, by Jonathan Beale, and we would like to thank him for his continued support and enthusiasm for our work over a number of years. We are delighted now be working with Jackie, as the relationship between OCC and the SCPMV becomes ever closer and stronger.

In August, Steve Feigen took over as Facilitator for the SCPMV from Stephen Fox, who had held it on a temporary basis following the retirement of Howard Dell. Shortly after this Stephen also handed over his responsibilities as the Area Secretary for area 8a, to Susan Maguire, who fulfilled the role of chairperson of Henley & Goring Ramblers for ten years. Amongst other achievements, she was jointly responsible for introducing the large scale, laminated parish path maps, which are produced by OCC, and are an invaluable resource for all the path reps. SCPMV recognises the important role the Area Secretaries and individual parish path reps play in monitoring the paths and maintaining relations with landowners, and in doing so feeding a continual stream of work for the maintenance volunteers. In order to further support them it has been agreed that the SCPMV will help in organising relevant training (in both monitoring and lightly maintaining the paths and in using the OCC CAMs reporting system). It is also intended to provide path reps with small hand tools and disk removers. The Chiltern Society has agreed to provide high-vis waistcoats to those reps who would find it useful to wear one.

Working with Steve, Dick Strange, the SCPMV membership secretary, changed our data gathering and communication practices to be in line with the Society's new GDPR guidelines, and Jenny Strange, who heads training and H&S for the SCPMV, worked with Gavin Johnston of the Chiltern Society to introduce new briefing and workday practices and new health cards. Stephen Fox remains responsible for coordinating gate installations, and Bob Parry remains clearance coordinator.



Borrowing the Fox Landrover at Little Stoke

Training undertaken in 2018 included Lantra and NPTC qualifications for chainsaw, but the highlight was probably a scanner training day, organized by Vanessa Buckley at OCC, and attended by 8 volunteers. The correct use of scanners to identify utility carriers when digging is obviously essential, and the course was very well received.

One new emphasis for the Group is to improve data collection so that the statistics relating to the work of the group provide a more comprehensive record of the time actually spent to achieve a task or project. This involves, for example, recording time spent on planning, costing, meeting landowners, coordination, sleeving, preparation, etc. – all of which are vital ingredients in the delivery of the project itself.

Another recent change is that the geographical area covered by the SCPMV has considerably extended over a period of two years or so, with work undertaken in Chinnor, Shirburn, Pyrton and also Berrick Salome. Some of these parishes have been sadly neglected in the past because of the absence of a path rep or other factors. We are delighted that in the South Chilterns, all three Area Secretaries now have a virtually full quota of active and dedicated path reps, and that paths in our area are ranked highly for ease of access and clarity of waymarking.



The Chiltern Society and the South Chilterns Path Maintenance Volunteers are extremely grateful for the essential help and support from the above organisations, but we would also like to thank those Parish Councils, local landowners, farmers and residents who make the task of helping to care for the Chilterns paths so much easier.

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