



Friends of the Path Annual Report, July 2013

The Friends of the Railway Path has now completed a second year. Since our 2012 AGM, we have been busy.

Projects

The list of projects we want to undertake is now available. We have defined the outline of each, identified our priorities and started work on some of them, as part of our regular programme of workdays (see below). The projects are a mix of conservation and habitat work, amenity improvements and public information such as leaflets.

You can find the outline descriptions on our website, at

<http://www.friendsofthepath.org.uk/projects.htm>

Workdays

We've held several volunteer workdays:

- 14th October 2012. This focused on the area just south of Ogbourne St. George (Project 10) and included tree planting, grassland management, car park clearing, and clearing the area round the bench.
- 23rd February 2013. We concentrated on the area south of the motorway bridge, and laid about 35m of hedge.
- We enjoyed this enough to lay another 10m on March 1st, and a small party planted up some gaps in the hedges just north of the motorway on April 10th.
- On 19th May 2013, we were in Marlborough, where we removed some mud which had drained onto the Path.
- We also helped out the local Sustrans Rangers group on a workday near South Cerney on November 18th, when to helped removed shrubs and small trees to widen a more northern section of the Path so that it's passable in more than just a single file.

Our workdays usually also include routine light maintenance (such as removing overhanging branches and brambles) and litter removal. We've reported separately on workday achievements: you can read these on our website. We're pleased with the attendance on workdays, which are enjoyed by those who come.

Other events

We have continued to organise other occasional events to illustrate aspects of the Path.

On 22nd May 2013 we walked along a section of Path at the Marlborough end in the company of Ian White from the Peoples' Trust for Endangered Species. Ian is their Dormouse Officer, and he explained how dormice live, what habitats they prefer and how to tell if there are any about.

On 20th June 2013 we organised (jointly with the Sustrans Rangers) an evening bike ride along the section from Coate Water to Ogbourne St George.

Partnerships and publicity

We continue to have support from

- North East Wiltshire Ramblers
- Wiltshire Bridleways Association
- North Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty
- Sustrans

Each of these organisations are represented on our committee. We have good relations with the Parish Councils of Chiseldon, Ogbourne St George and Ogbourne St Andrew, and with the Town Council in Marlborough. We are also starting to work with the Marlborough Downs Nature Improvement Area, which shares some environmental objectives with us.

We organise publicity for ourselves and our events by putting up notices along the Path, through our website and by email. We have also run stalls during the course of the year

- In Swindon at the start of Bike Week in June 2013 (jointly with the Sustrans Rangers)
- At the Barbury Endurance Ride in August 2012
- In Marlborough at the AGM of the Campaign for the preservation of Rural England, in June 2013

Stalls can be a good way of meeting people and talking to them.

Into the future

We will continue with the volunteer workday programme, which is both enjoyable, and creates a noticeable impact on the places where we work. This is a good way of engaging local people, and making simple improvements. Workdays are currently planned for September 14th, October 13th and November 23rd.

We've had several comments to the effect that people would like to see improvements to the Path surface, especially south of Ogbourne St George, near the access point of Ogbourne Maizey and at the access point from the Hodson Road north of Chiseldon. These patches badly need attention and Sustrans may, in the longer term, be able to make some substantial improvements. However, in the short term we would like to fundraise to improve the surface at these specific points.

We would also like to see a better end to the Path in Marlborough. At the moment, there is a steep and stony link between the Path and 5 Stiles Road. We would like to see an extension of the Path along the line of the old railway to the new Marlborough Business Park (where Tesco now is). This would be a substantial project, and would need to be undertaken perhaps by Wiltshire Council.

Getting involved

As always, we can do more if more people chip in to help. If you would like to get involved (as a project manager, leaflet designer, fundraiser, committee member, ...) please let us know.

We would welcome more

Dick Millard
Chair and Secretary
Friends of the Railway Path
15th July 2012

<http://www.friendsofthepath.org.uk/index.htm>