



Friends of the Path Annual Report, July 2014

As well as continuing with a programme of workdays, we have tried this year to find other organisations with complementary interests. This means we have been able to do more than we could on our own.

Workdays

We've held several volunteer workdays:

- 13th October 2013. This focused on the area just south of Ogbourne St. George (Project 10). We were thwarted by the weather, which was forecast to be wet. And sure enough the rain set in solidly from about 11 a.m. A small party of us did manage to rake some mown grass away from the old bridleway south of the car park. We also removed a fallen tree from the path near Elcot Lane, Marlborough.
- 7th December 2013 and 22nd February 2014. These were two more hedgelaying days in between Coate Water and Chiseldon, in the. We laid about 35m of hedge south of the motorway bridge. This stretch of path is looking a lot better, with more sense of space and many fewer brambles and branches getting in the way as you travel along it. And we ended the day in December with a visit to the Sun Inn at Coate.
- We also plan a workday in the Marlborough area on 19th July.

The local group of Sustrans Rangers have also been out on several occasions after bouts of strong wind, removing fallen or overhanging tree.

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. Our workdays in 2013/14 contributed 94 volunteer hours of work.

Partnerships and fundraising

In October 2013 we received a grant from Link 2 Nature, the Local Nature Partnership for Wiltshire and Swindon. This allowed us to commission LEAVES, a social enterprise, to clear brambles and scrub from the cutting near Whitefield Farm north of Ogbourne St George. This patch of high diversity chalk grassland is in need of attention to check invasion and restore the quality of the grass. The Wiltshire Wildlife Fund conduct occasional surveys of the patch, and their survey in September 2013 found that short-turf species were getting scarcer. We would like to establish an annual maintenance regime for the patch, and include in our regular pattern of workdays.

In November 2013 a team from TWIGS, a horticultural therapy service helping people recovering from mental health difficulties, did some more scrub bashing on a smaller bank of grassland a little further north, at the crossing with Gipsy Lane.

In March the same team planted 420 hedge saplings to fill gaps in the hedge leading from Coate Water to the motorway, and to start re-establishing a boundary with the field just north of Chiseldon Firs. We hope that in a few years we may be able to lay these. The saplings were provided by the Woodland Trust under their community tree pack scheme.

The Woodland Trust also provided materials for one of our hedgelaying workdays, which came from Warneage Wood in Wanborough. It is clearly a good idea to use local material for hedgelaying and we hope to repeat this when we do more laying in the next laying season.

A group of pupils from a local school working for their Duke of Edinburgh Silver Award have improved the area round a bench just south of Chiseldon.

Sustrans have made improvements to the path surface in several places: in the cutting near Whitefield Farm, and just south of Ogbourne St Andrew. They have also commissioned work on a longer stretch south of Ogbourne St George.

Local residents have paid to improve the access leading to the path from the Hodson Road north of Chiseldon.

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.

Projects

Some of our defined projects (<http://www.friendsofthepath.org.uk/projects.htm>) have benefited from the work we've done.

- The hedgelaying in December and February and the hedge gap planting contributed to Project 1: Curly Wurly Bridge.
- The hedge re-establishment at Chiseldon Firs contributed to Project 5.
- The TWIGS work at Gipsy Lane contributed to Project 6: Gipsy Lane Hedges and Grassland.
- Project 7: Whitefield Farm Grassland was taken forward by the LEAVES work and the Sustrans resurfacing there.
- Project 10: Ogbourne St. George play area and grassland was the focus of the October workday.

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. Workdays are a good way of engaging local people, and making simple improvements. The next ones are planned for October 26th and December 6th. Depending on the state of the path, we may organise another for September.

We plan to apply for a Landfill Communities Grant which can be used to commission Sustrans to work on the drain by the A4 bridge in Marlborough. Drainage at this point has been a long-running problem.

We also plan applications to several funders for contributions to projects at:

- Chiseldon to improve the entrance to the path next door to the Farm Shop on the Ridgeway (Project 3)
- Marlborough to deal with some very large trees on the embanked bridge over the River Kennet which are beginning to damage the embankment. The work will also improve habitat for small mammals.

We have planned two bat walks in the early evening: one at Chiseldon heading towards Coate Water on 7th August, the other leaving Marlborough on September 23rd.

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.

Dick Millard
Chair and Secretary
Friends of the Railway Path
11th July 2014

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