

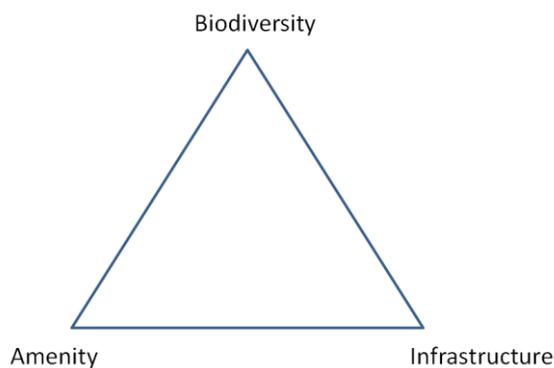


Friends of the Path Annual Review, January 2013

It's traditional at about this time of year to review what happened in the last one and take a look into the future to see what's coming.

Review of 2012

We started the year with an Open Meeting in Chiseldon. The Calley Memorial Hall was full, and the discussion identified both what local people would like to see happen on and around the Path, and what stopped them enjoying it as much as they would like. This generated lots of excellent ideas for improvement, loosely grouped under three headings:



- Biodiversity: natural habitats and landscape along the Path
- Infrastructure: physical aspects of the Path, including access, signing, surfacing, encroaching vegetation
- Amenity: using the Path and its surroundings for enjoyment.

Clearly, these headings overlap: almost anything you do on the Path will have some effect on habitats, on physical aspects and on Path users' enjoyment. The trick we have to pull off is to try and make improvements to each without harming any.

By the time we reached our AGM, held in the newly opened Three Trees Farm shop and café in June, we had an outline description of 14 projects which we presented. We had also received an ecology survey of the Path from Marlborough to Coate Water, thanks to Sustrans who commissioned their ecologist to do the survey and write the report. This is enormously helpful in several ways. It identifies valuable habitats along the Path, with some management recommendations on how to enhance them. It also identifies areas which are less important as habitats – which means that we can be less concerned about preserving them and can consider doing other things in these locations. You can access the report at:

<https://www.dropbox.com/sh/ydqwrjyos9p0vq0/G9xPaIUOiB>



We now have 21 projects defined in outline, with an initial short list of 4 which we are getting moving on. More on these later.

Workdays

We've used the project definitions and the ecology report to help construct our programme of workdays on the Path. In 2012 we held 3, on 19th February (around Chiseldon Firs), 20th May (between Marlborough and Poulton Down) and 14th October (at Ogbourne St George). Workdays are a great way of getting some exercise in the open air while doing useful work whose impact you can see immediately. Ours have been well attended, typically with 10 or 12 people turning up. We organise them jointly with the local group of Sustrans volunteer Rangers and are pleased to find a mix of Rangers, Friends and members of the local community coming along.

Events

One of the wonderful things about the Path is the way it links to so many other routes around the local landscape. Many events use the Path for part of a circuit. In 2012, this included a Sustrans "Fresh Air Miles" ride during Bike Week in June; the Macmillan Castles bike rides, also in June; and the Ridgeway and Barbury Castle Endurance Ride in August. We did not organise an event of our own in 2012 (although we did stage an inaugural bike ride from Coate to Marlborough in 2011). However, for 2013 we have an event plan: see later.



Working with others

Most organisations (and individual people!) have more impact if they work with others. We are grateful to Sustrans, the Wiltshire Bridleways Association, the North East group of Wiltshire Ramblers and the North Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty which have each provided members of our managing committee.

Sustrans have been regularly maintaining the Path throughout the year. As well as their normal maintenance regime, they have also commissioned the resurfacing of two sections. The first, just north of where the Path passes under the A4 in Marlborough, has reduced deterioration due to flooding – though more needs to be done here. The second, where the Path enters Chiseldon from the north, has improved a particularly steep and bumpy section making it a better experience for runners and cyclists.

We have established good relations with most of the local authorities through whose areas the Path goes. Swindon Borough Council have provided better signing, including some fine wooden posts and signs; Marlborough Town Council have given us a grant to help launch and make some improvements for Marlborough residents and visitors – and they have become a corporate member of the Friends; Chiseldon and Ogbourne St George parish councils have expressed support; and Wiltshire Council plan to help with signing particularly in Marlborough and have offered support in helping to define habitat improvements.

The Wiltshire Wildlife Trust has made several practical suggestions for biodiversity improvements and educational activities, and we are also looking forward to linking with the Marlborough Downs Nature Improvement Area which is now starting to define its own projects, with which ours will be complementary.

We are also pleased that our press releases and other information also get posted on the village websites for Ogbourne St George and Baydon.

Plans for 2013

Events

Our provisional events plan for 2013 is pretty full. Details are still to be confirmed, and will be advertised by email and on our website.

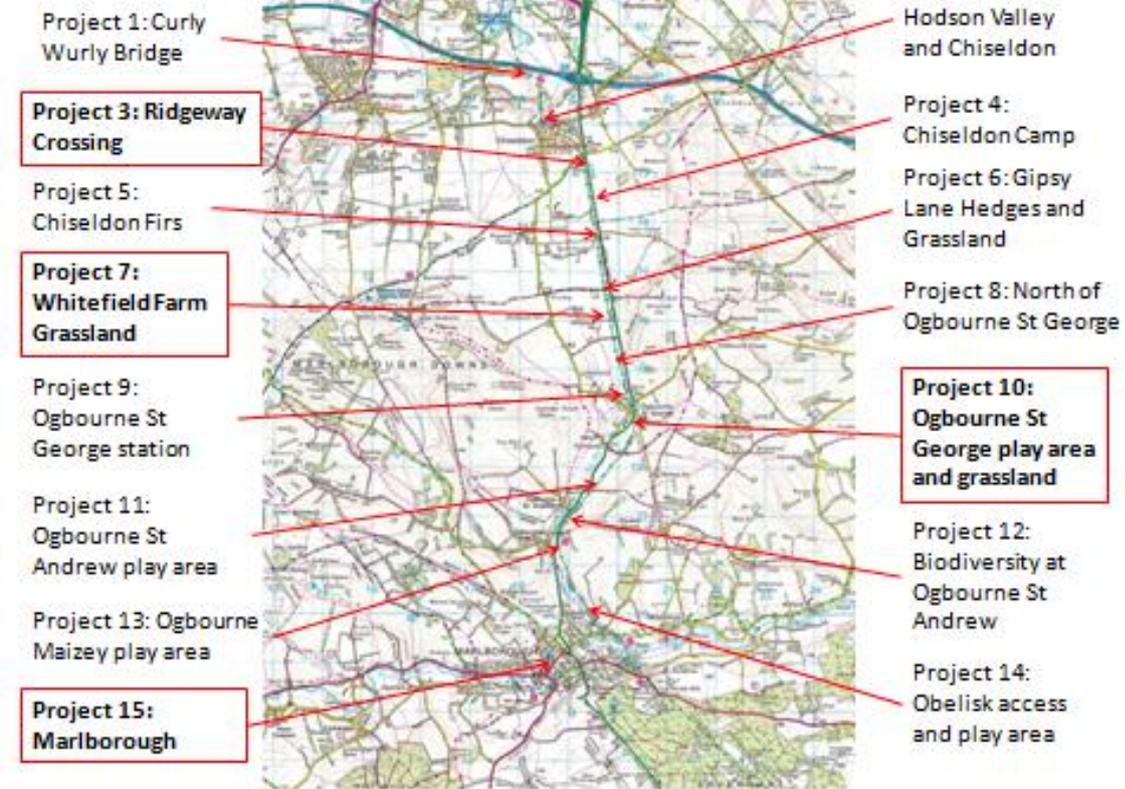
| Date | Event | Location | Description |
|------------------------------------|-------------------------------|--|---|
| Sat 23 Feb | Workday | Coate Water to Chiseldon | Bridleway clearance, hedgerow planting and hedge laying (tbc) |
| Late April (to be confirmed) | Richard Jefferies walk / ride | Coate – Liddington – Chiseldon | A journey round the landscape associated with this local author and naturalist |
| Sun 19 May | Workday | Marlborough to Poulton Farm | Ivy cutting (in selected high risk locations), general tidy (tbc) |
| Wed 22 May | Dormouse walk | Marlborough to Poulton Down | Evening walk lead by Ian White, the Dormouse Officer at the People's Trust for Endangered Species |
| Sat 15 June | Bike Week launch event | Sports field by the County Ground, Swindon | Stall / display |
| Bike Week (15th to 23rd June 2013) | Evening ride | From Coate Water heading south | Ride lead by Sustrans Ranger, open to all abilities |
| Mid July (to be confirmed) | Project day | A visit to one or more of the Friends project sites. | Bring-and-share lunch (or BBQ). We could have an onsite description of the projects and do a bit of work |
| Mid August (to be confirmed) | Challenge Ride | Coate to Marlborough | In the school holidays, aimed at families. Start at either end, with optional finish at Ogbourne St George. |
| 17 – 18 Aug | Barbury Endurance Ride | Barbury | Stall / display |
| Sun 13 Oct | Workday | Og.St George to Og. St Andrew | Bridleway clearance, grassland creation and tree planting |
| Sat 23 Nov | Workday | Chiseldon to Gipsy Lane | Hedge laying, general tidy |

Projects

The index to our project list is shown below. The four highlighted are the ones which we have adopted as first priorities. The full set of project outlines is available at <https://www.dropbox.com/sh/32ade2bl14gsjnx/V8RaXcalQW>. We would love to have some feedback, especially if you think;

- Our priorities are wrong; or
- We have missed a valuable improvement opportunity; or
- We should amend a project that you're particularly interested in.

Project index



Best wishes for 2013

Dick Millard
Chair

Appendix: Workday Reports 2012

Sunday 19th February 2012

Location: Chiseldon to Chiseldon Firs

We had a good turn out and achieved a huge amount and the 1.7 miles of track between the Ridgeway crossing south of Chiseldon and Gipsy Lane now has several improvements.

We ...

- Planted native trees in gaps in defunct hedgerow just south of the car park, as a prelude to bringing sections of hedgerow back into management.
- Cleared scrub from the edges of 3 patches of medium-diversity grassland to prevent it being over run, and cleared invading vegetation from within these patches. We piled what we cleared to provide habitat for small animals. See the attached pictures for before and after views of the patch just north of Chiseldon Firs.
- Removed debris from the path surface (leaf fall, and left over from hedge trimming) over a 0.5 mile section around Chiseldon Firs to make cycling easier and keep the path edge from getting overgrown.
- Cut back small trees where they were invading the bridleway, allowing horse riders more space.
- Installed posts and signing at intervals between the Ridegway and Chiseldon Firs asking horse-riders to keep to the path edge.
- Collected about 15 bags of litter.

Sunday 20th May 2012

We met the Barnfield Road access point to the path near Elcot Lane, Marlborough. In the dry but not too warm weather, we achieved a great deal.

At the Barnfield access point we:

- Fitted a new arm to the Millennium Mile Post, pointing to Swindon and Cirencester and repainted the arms
- Fitted No Parking signs just outside the gate (to discourage parking on the verge)
- Raked over a damaged verge to regrade, fitted an edging board and replanted with grass seed

At Poulton Down bridge we:

- Removed ivy on trees at high risk of falling
- Cut back sprouting on felled stumps either side of the bridge, to prevent re-growth and damage to the bridge fabric
- Cleared round and swept the off mysterious rune-like artwork on the path further to the north

Between the A4 bridge and Poulton Down we cleared litter and tidied up, especially under bridges: and removed overhanging branches and new brambles at eye height.

We also handed out leaflets and stopped to talk to many cyclists, walkers, runners and horse-riders using the path.

Sunday 14th October 2012

The day was fine, after a chilly start in which the rising sun melted a light frost and drew the mist from the ground and from the fence posts. A small group of us achieved a lot:

We cut grass and some encroaching weeds (mostly nettle) from a patch on the NW side of the path, about 40 yards long by 5 yards wide. We left 5 or 6 inches of grass over this area to protect invertebrates and removed the cuttings to the boundary where we piled them to make a dead hedge. We surprised at least one grass snake in the process. We hope that this patch, having had some nutrients removed from it, will start to regenerate as grassland with a higher diversity of grasses and chalk flowers. We also removed the remains of an old post and wire fence from this area.



On the south east side of the path, we planted small beech plants along a 20 yards gap in the boundary hedge. We used some of the grass cuttings as a mulch. Later, we hope to plant further whips, and later still to lay the resulting hedge.



We cleared vegetation to allow access to a bench next to the small area of woodland just inside the gate. We re-fixed its seat and also cleared nettles from just behind the bench so now children (and anyone else who wants) can go into the patch of wood to explore a bit, and climb the trees. We cut back some of the overhanging branches and brambles to give a better view from the bench out across to the Downs by Ogbourne St Andrew.



In the car park we scraped away several inches of built up grass and mud back to hard surface, and cut drainage channels. There is now more room for parking cars and horse boxes at this access point, although more remains to be done.

We cleared vegetation and renewed the sign into the car park to make it clearer where this section of the path starts.



We also removed all the litter which we came across: to my delight, there wasn't much of this.