The Role of the Parish Path Warden

Since 2012 Oxfordshire Area Ramblers, the Oxford Fieldpaths Society and the County Council’s Countryside Access Team (CAT) have been working together to develop a network of Parish Path Wardens (PPWs) throughout the County. Including those Parishes that are served by the Cotswold Wardens and the Chiltern Society about 80% of the 320 parishes in Oxfordshire have a PPW in place. A PPW is a volunteer.  There are 4 main aspects to the role.

The main and by far the most important task of a PPW is to walk the paths in the parish twice a year or more, equipped with secateurs, to do any trimming away of vegetation that may be overhanging or protruding onto the path, usually at a stile, gate or bridge. Also PPWs are asked to clean footpath direction signs, and scrape away any vegetation growing on bridge decks.

The second task is, if while walking the paths, the PPW spots a serious problem (usually quite rare), for example a bridge where some of the rails are wobbly/dangerous, this is reported as soon as possible to the Field Officer of the CAT with photos if possible.

The third task is to send any new less-serious reports to the CAT using the on-line CAMSweb reporting system.

Finally twice a year the PPW receives information on the unresolved problems for his parish via the Local Coordinator. A Local Coordinator looks after a team of PPWs operating in his/her are. On walking the footpaths if a PPW notices that the problem has been sorted, for example the farmer may have repaired an unsafe stile, the CAT is emailed that the problem has been resolved. Often problems are resolved locally but the land-owner/farmer does not bother to inform the CAT.  In this way the PPW is acting as the ‘eyes’ of the CAT.

There are detailed Guidelines for PPWs and Supplementary Information. PPWs are provided with a large scale map of their parish which shows all the Public Rights of Way in detail with their numbers etc. This is a reference guide for any checking etc.

PPWs are encouraged to contact their Parish Clerk in order to let the Parish Council know of their existence and the important role they undertake in helping to maintain the path network in good order.

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