

# Take care of your footpaths

I am very glad to see that in Clun there are now three groups that walk the countryside and one group that goes 'around town' for exercise. We also have Peter James' and others who do their best to see that local paths are marked and clear. These groups are informally organised; nothing to join, no dues to pay, one can just show up at the time and place advertised in the Chronicle and enjoy! There is a need for leaders, so volunteers are always welcome, but if you are not fit enough or have no desire to take on a leader's responsibilities, I am sure you will be warmly welcomed anyway.

I have a personal emotional investment in Shropshire Rights-of-Way because in the 90's I was the Shropshire representative for the Open Spaces Society (OSS). I volunteered for this post when I saw what a dreadful state local paths were in, in the Parish there were 108 places where there should have been fingerposts, 10 were in place. There were also missing stiles and paths blocked by crops and barbed wire; really awful, and a far cry from what is walked today, and no one was doing much about it.

As OSS rep. my wife and I roamed the length and breadth of Salop examining footpaths nominated for closure or diversion. I was at Shire Hall weekly to attend committee meetings and to discuss footpath problems. I commented on every

proposed change to paths and I represented the OSS at Public Inquiries. I am particularly proud that I helped change the mindset of many who inhabit Shire Hall, and that I got Clun to the top of the list when the County abandoned their piecemeal approach to working on paths in favour of completely repairing paths in a small group of adjoining parishes.

Why am I telling you all this? Partly to toot my own horn, but more importantly to deliver the message that the Rights-of-Way network DOES NOT LOOK AFTER ITSELF. Many, many people use the footpaths, bridleways and byways, but very few actively work to protect them. Walkers are wonderful people, but unfortunately, they are hesitant to get involved in official matters. They are happy to use the network and organize locally for enjoyment, but they do not always do all they can to protect Rights-of-Way. Does your group have a standard procedure to assist in reporting blocked paths and broken stiles? – not many do. If yours does, write in and tell everyone about it, help others, as well as proving me wrong!

Throughout the country the few that are actively working for paths belong to organizations that support them and give their words and actions sufficient 'clout' with local and national government. However, these organisations must, in turn, have the support of a great many users,

including you and me. We can do our part by joining an organization such as the Ramblers, the OSS, the Campaign for the Protection of Rural England, the British Horse Society or any other organisation that is working for YOU as you use the Rights-of-Way network.

Do not be fooled into thinking the Rights-of-way network will always be there for you to use. It is a national treasure that is under constant threat. Do your part or this fair land might end up like my native country, where as one approaches a field edge, one will find no stile, but quite possibly, a man with a shotgun.

*Cliff Freund*