

Headbourne Worthy, Nuns Walk Footpath (FP6 / 701)
Nuns Walk Improvement
Sunday 21st September 2008



**Worthys
Conservation
Volunteers**

Nuns Walk footpath runs from Headbourne Worthy to Abbots Barton, leading into the heart of Winchester – the eastern section passes under and, for a short distance, follows the A34; the western section runs alongside the northern edge of Winnall Moors and the banks of the River Itchen.

The footpath is much used by walkers, cyclists and runners alike, offering splendid views into Winnall Moors nature reserve and the floodplain meadows, with their abundance of wildlife.

The path has in recent times suffered from neglect, being in much need of improvements to both drainage and access. Our work was confined to the stretch of footpath running under the bridges, adjacent to the A34, and the patch of boggy ground just further along by the river. Aims of the task were to:

- clear litter
- clear leaves and mud from tunnels
- cut nettle and bramble
- fill numerous potholes
- prune hedge and remove small trees
- improve drainage around tunnels, and
- improve drainage near the river.



Having collected machinery (mechanical barrow, compactor and petrol strimmer) and other useful tools from HPP, several volunteers gathered at 12 noon. Immediately, a small task force set about clearing up the litter, discarded metal signs, canisters, etc, from the footpath and ditches; the rest were organised into smaller groups – a strimmer party, a excavation/compacting party, and a barrow party – starting the heavy duty work at about 12.30pm, after being given instructions about the use of the mechanical tools by the HPP officer. Suitable caution signs were already erected at each end of the work area.



We had hoped to have quickly cleared the bramble and nettle to give better access along the path, but unfortunately the petrol strimmer was proving somewhat temperamental, so we resorted to handheld slashers instead – it became apparent that this is now Nick's favourite tool (a suitable tool for school disciplinary purposes he wonders!!?!). Good progress was made, and we were soon able to start transporting the aggregate using the mechanical barrow, which caused quite a deafening roar as it passed through the tunnels. A deep hole – the worst of the potholes – had already been excavated by the time the first load arrived, the aggregate being carefully offloaded into the hole.

Meanwhile the strimmer was now working, ensuring better progress and enabling us to more easily cut the full section of the path – special caution was made to forewarn passersby.

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Once the litter picking was complete, work to clear the tunnels of mud and leaves and create new drainage channels began, occupying a group of six for the rest of the afternoon. This made a considerable difference to what was undoubtedly one of the more unpleasant stretches of the path.

A few more volunteers arrived at 1.30pm, who were given the task of pruning the long hedge.

It took several more loads to fill the biggest pothole, and after this was satisfactorily compacted, the group moved on to filling the next hole.



Guess who's got a saw in his hand?!

After a couple of hours, we stopped for a well-deserved tea break, with delicious homemade cakes and biscuits kindly handed round by Margaret. A few group photos were taken in which our new range of fluorescent clothing was modelled, after which the work continued!

All the aggregate from two large sacks, supplied by HPP, was used, filling the potholes along the entire section. (When it was my turn to use the mechanical compactor, the challenge was finding the 'on' switch, which Martin found most entertaining!)

As well as trimming the hedge, a fairly large fallen tree and several other small trees were cut and removed.

Some progress to help clear away excess water on the path by the river was tackled, most of the mud and slush being splattered all over Sue – to be completed next time ...

Several passers-by commented on our good work – hopefully next time they will be inspired to join us!!

Finally, tools and mechanical equipment were loaded into the van, and rubbish stacked for later collection.

All in all 19 volunteers contributed to the day's success: Bruce, Nick, Margaret, Clare, Connie, Martin, Sue, Lizzie, Jonathan, Charlotte, Imogen, Nick, Rosie, Lenny, Pam, David and Sheila (Headbourne Worthy Parish Councilors), Jackie (Hampshire County Councilor), and Justin from HPP.

A splendid job was done by all and we all had fun even though the work was hard – made light by the large turnout. A big thank-you to all those who helped.



Just some of the volunteers

The footpath along the section was much improved, giving better access and NO potholes.

Bruce Graham. Weather: dry and sunny, 18°C.

Next Activities:

Sunday 19th October, 1.30pm – Fungus Foray, Micheldever Wood.

Sunday 16th November, 1.30pm – St Swithuns Habitat Improvement, Headbourne Worthy.