

Welcome!

Thank you for your interest in volunteering for The Ridgeway and Thames Path National Trails.

By volunteering with us, you will be playing an essential part in our work of maintaining, improving and promoting the National Trails to ensure that they are safe and enjoyable for everybody to use.

This pack is divided into 4 sections:

1. General information that everyone will need, like how to claim expenses, newsletters and training.
2. Specific information about our various opportunities for practical, monitoring, administrative and workshop opportunities. It includes guidance on Health & Safety to ensure that you stay safe, while volunteering with us.
3. A copy of our volunteer's policy for your information.
4. Appendix containing all the forms you will need.

The aim of this pack is to give you all the information you might need to settle into your role as soon as possible. However, if there is anything that is unclear, or you have unanswered questions, please feel free to contact us either by phone on 01865 810211 or email ntvolunteers@oxfordshire.gov.uk

Section 1: General Information

Background to the scheme

The National Trails network crosses some of the finest landscapes in England & Wales. They provide a series of nationally and internationally recognised walks and rides. The aim of our National Trails Team is to manage and maintain The Ridgeway & Thames Path to a standard that is consistent and sympathetic to the landscape through which the trails pass, meet the requirements of its users and is appropriate to their use.

The National Trails Volunteer Scheme was set up in 1990 to provide a more efficient and cost effective way of undertaking the maintenance of The Ridgeway whilst enabling local people to be involved in its management. In 1997, the scheme was expanded to include management of the Thames Path National Trail. The volunteer scheme has continued to develop with volunteers playing a vital role in maintaining and improving the trails, monitoring their condition and, until recently, leading guided events on both trails.

An introduction to the National Trails Team

National Trails Officer (NTO): Martin Fry

Martin is the manager of the route maintenance team, and oversees the strategic direction, budgets and partnership working. He also secures funding for all route maintenance and the volunteer scheme.

Project & Volunteer Scheme Coordinator: Steven Tabbitt

Steve is responsible for organising the work of contractors maintaining the trails as well as liaising with landowners and planning work. As Volunteer Scheme Coordinator, Steve oversees budget management, recruitment and receives reports from our volunteer monitors.

National Trail Assistant (NTA): Sara Piggott

Sara is responsible for setting up task diaries, running work parties and assisting Steve in coordinating the works/permissions prior to tasks.

Admin Assistant (AA): Darian Jeffs

Darian provides administrative support to the route maintenance team. Darian is the person you are most likely to speak to if you call with general enquiries, phone in your monitor reports or have an enquiry about volunteering or task bookings.

Information & Admin Officer (IAO): Elaine Townson

Elaine manages our website and the distribution of promotional literature. She is also likely to be the person that you speak to if you enquire about facilities and accommodation on the trails.

Volunteer expenses

As far as possible we try to make sure that our volunteers are not out of pocket as a result of volunteering and are happy to reimburse reasonable travel expenses for getting to tasks and monitoring.

We will pay for a maximum 50-mile round trip (i.e. a radius of 25 miles per trip) at 45p per mile for cars and 24p per mile for motorcycles or the equivalent cost per trip for public transport. Longer trips will be reimbursed only if approved in advance by our Project Coordinator. Where a longer trip is made without prior approval, we will pay £22.50 towards the cost.

As we are committed to reducing the carbon footprint of our scheme, we pay an extra 5p per mile for car share. In addition, we will pay 20p per mile for travel by push bike, or any other carbon neutral method.

At the end of this pack, there is an expenses claim form. Expenses can only be paid in the same financial year as they were accrued in, so it is important that you submit a claim every three months and every March (for the end of the financial year).

This form, plus any tickets, should be sent to National Trails Office, Countryside Service, Signal Court, Old Station Way, Eynsham, Oxford, OX29 4TL.

Training

A lot of training that we provide will be informal “on the job” training, delivered by staff over the course of your volunteering. However, we do provide more formal training where there is a need, either by sending volunteers on courses or where possible by running courses in-house.

We assess the needs of our existing volunteers every two years by sending out a simple questionnaire, our “Volunteer Satisfaction Survey”.

We want volunteering with us to be a rewarding and worthwhile experience for you and we will try to meet whatever needs you might have. However, we do need to provide the training that is most requested by all of our volunteers so please be patient if the course you are interested in takes a little while to happen.

Also, we would ask you to keep your training requests realistic. We are a relatively small project with limited funds, so are not in the position of being able to offer long-term or expensive training. That said, we would be happy to support you in other ways, such as finding materials and discussing our experiences.

Volunteer newsletter

Our newsletter is mailed or emailed out to our volunteers 4 times a year (Jan, April, July, Oct). You will receive it as a PDF unless you do not have an email address, or you have specifically asked for it to be posted.

Each edition will contain the task diary for that period for our practical and workshop volunteers, plus regular updates about the project, work on the trails and volunteer training.

We are happy to receive short articles and photographs from our volunteers for inclusion in the newsletter. These should be emailed to ntvolunteers@oxfordshire.gov.uk with text saved as a Microsoft Word compatible document, and images as JPEG files. The copy deadline for each newsletter is the beginning of the month before it is published (ie the beginning of Dec, Mar, Jun, Sept).

Volunteering equipment

Volunteer T-Shirt: All our volunteers are provided with one free T-Shirt, and more can be purchased at the discounted rate of £5 each. They are available in XL, L, M or S.

Volunteer Cap: Each of our volunteers will be provided with this item free.

Volunteer car sticker: These are provided to any volunteer who requests one. We would emphasise that displaying one of these does not give you any special rights on where you can park or drive.

Volunteer Mug: These break proof recycled plastic mugs are provided free to practical and workshop volunteers, who are requested to bring them to each task they attend. Other volunteers can purchase one if they wish for £3.50.

Gloves: These are provided free to our practical volunteers who are requested to bring them to each task. Gloves are replaced on a 12-monthly basis, or sooner if required.

Section 2: Specific information for volunteers

Information for Practical Task Volunteers

As one of our practical volunteers, you will play a crucial role in maintaining both trails by carrying out routine maintenance like mowing and vegetation clearance, projects to improve signs and gates and helping us to deal with reactive issues like fallen trees or vandalism.

Task diary

Every three months, all our practical volunteers receive a task diary which is on the centre pages of the newsletter, as well as the online newsletter. This will include a chronological list of tasks, plus a map showing their approximate locations. Once you have had a look through the task diary, you should contact us to book onto all the tasks that interest you.

How to book onto tasks

To book onto tasks, please contact us, either by phone on 01865 810211 or by email on ntvolunteers@oxfordshire.gov.uk and give us the date and location of each task you would like to book on to.

Once you have told us which tasks you are interested in, you will be contacted by the National Trails Assistant, who will give you the exact meeting point and times for each task. It is occasionally necessary to change or cancel tasks but we will ensure that you are contacted if this is the case.

We have a four-seater vehicle and where possible are happy to give lifts to site as long as you can meet us at a mutually convenient pick up point. If you are going to need picking up, please mention this when booking.

Please make your bookings as soon as possible, and no later than one week before the task. Most tasks, with the exception of scrub clearance, have limited spaces and are booked on a first-come-first-serve basis, and booking early is important to avoid disappointment.

Before your first task

Before you attend your first task, you should ensure that you have told us if you have any relevant medical conditions, given us contact details for your next of kin, and have had a tetanus shot in the last 5 years. Please use the relevant form at the back of the pack to send us this information. You should also read all the Health & Safety guidance contained in this section, and contact our Project Coordinator if you have any questions about it.

What to bring/wear

You should wear clothing suitable for outdoor work that you don't mind getting dirty, and which is appropriate for the time of year. In cold weather it is better to wear multiple thin layers rather than a few thick one's, so that you can easily remove some if you get hot while working.

You should wear stout footwear such as walking boots or work boots to protect your feet. Trainers and normal shoes aren't suitable. If you have steel toe-capped boots, these are ideal. It is also a good idea to bring a waterproof coat, regardless of the weather forecast or time of year. Unfortunately, we do not have the resources to provide boots and waterproofs to our volunteers.

On your first task, you will be given a mug, t-shirt, pair of gloves and hat. You should wear or bring these to all future tasks. We provide hot drinks (tea & coffee) but if you prefer de-caffeinated or herbal tea please bring this along. Please also remember to bring a packed lunch.

How a task runs

The exact times for meeting vary from task to task and you will be advised of these when your booking is confirmed. Generally, most tasks start at 10am, stop for lunch at around 12 noon, then end circa 3.30pm.

Each task will start with a briefing from the supervisor who will carry out an on-site risk assessment. They will explain what work is to be done and why, how this should be done, as well as reminding everyone about the safe use of tools and identify any special considerations and site hazards. If any volunteers haven't used specific equipment before (particularly power tools) then the task supervisor will spend time with them delivering on-the-job training to ensure safe and effective use.

During the task, the supervisor will circulate to ensure that everyone is happy and that work is being done to the required standard. If you have any questions about what you are doing or why, please ask the supervisor straight away – as far as task safety goes, there are no “stupid questions”.

Roaming tasks

You will notice in the task diary that occasionally a task will be described as roaming, and will not have a location given. These tasks are kept spare to deal with anything that arises after the diary has gone out, such as fallen trees, broken gates and work left uncompleted from other tasks.

Attendance on these tasks is limited to three and generally involves “roaming” around in our vehicle, visiting multiple locations and dealing with anything that needs doing. The normal meeting point for these tasks is our depot at Eynsham (Signal Court, Old Station Way, OX29 4TL) at around 9am and return at about 4pm.

Health & Safety guidance for practical volunteers

Every task and site will vary and all the risks associated with the job and site will have been assessed beforehand so that your task supervisor can brief you on any specifics at the start of each task. The points that follow are for general guidance only:

Emergencies and first aid: Your task supervisor is a trained first aider and will have a mobile phone with which to call the emergency services if required. During the task briefing, they will tell everyone where the first aid kit, mobile phone and truck keys are – just in case it is the supervisor who is the victim of an accident. If any volunteers on the task are also first aiders, they will also be identified at this point.

All accidents and injuries however minor should be reported to the supervisor immediately.

Personal Protective Equipment: Depending on the nature of the task, your supervisor may ask you wear a range of protective equipment. In all cases, you should comply with these requests, as it is for your own safety. We are aware that some PPE can be hot or uncomfortable to work in, but we would not ask you to wear it if it was not necessary. And it is better to be slightly uncomfortable than risk a serious injury.

Also remember that other volunteers or staff who are wearing ear defenders won't be able to hear you approaching them. Therefore, please stop a safe distance away, and attract their attention by shouting or using gestures.

Site tidiness: It is important to keep the site as tidy as possible during work, both for our own safety and also that of trail users who may be passing through. Your supervisor will direct how each site should be organised, but it is everyone's responsibility to ensure that the site is kept tidy.

A change is as good as a rest – although a rest is pretty good too! You should work at a pace which suits you. The task is not a competition to see who can do the most, so don't be afraid to rest if you feel the need. It is also a good idea to work in small teams with 1 or 2 other volunteers and rotate tasks so that you aren't doing the same thing all day. If you find any specific task to be too hard for your health or level of fitness, speak to your task supervisor.

Safe lifting & handling: You should not lift more than you feel you are able to. You should not attempt to lift anything over 25kg without the assistance of someone else. If you need help, ask for it.

When lifting anything heavy, bend your knees rather than your back, get a good grip and try to keep the load near to your body.

Safe working distance: The actual distance will vary depending on what you are doing but it is critically important that you are aware of where other volunteers, staff and members of the public are. You should ensure that there

is sufficient distance to safely use whichever piece of equipment you have. Your task supervisor will advise on specific distances at the beginning of the task.

Lymes disease: This is sometimes carried by ticks on deer and sheep. The risk of contact with either on The Ridgeway or Thames Path is very low, but if you have been working in dense long grass it is a good idea to check yourself over for them when you get home. If you have picked up a tick, you should twist it free with tweezers and disinfect the spot with antiseptic wipes. If, after this, you develop flu like symptoms within 14 days, you should consult your doctor at once.

Weils disease (*Leptospirosis*): Weils disease is carried by rats and the risk of infection comes from getting dirty water on cuts, in the eyes or in your mouth. Again, the risk of either on our trails is minimal, but you should cover any open wounds with waterproof plasters and wash your hands before eating.

Health & Safety on vegetation management tasks

Site tidiness: Due to the nature of the work, vegetation management has the highest potential to create trip hazards by leaving cut debris lying around. Therefore, you should tidy up as you go, rather than leaving it until the end of the task. Your supervisor will advise you where cut vegetation should be placed. Generally, it should be stacked well off the trail and cut through with a pole saw or chainsaw (qualified users only) to compress the heap.

Hand tool use: The two tools most likely to be used for vegetation clearance are loppers and bow saws. The loppers are designed to cut vegetation roughly the thickness of your thumb or thinner, while the bow saw is designed to cut thicker branches up to about 4". The bow saw can also be used to fell small trees of a similar dimension. When you are not using the tools, they should be laid flat on the ground and well out of the way, so that no one can trip over them. Neither tool should be hung on trees or stuck in the ground, as this poses a major hazard if anyone should fall against them.

Power tools: You shouldn't use any tool until you have been trained in using it by the task supervisor (or in the case of chainsaws, until you have passed both units CS 30 & 31 of the NPTC course). We ask that volunteers do not bring their own tools on task. The National Trails office will provide and maintain all suitable tools for practical tasks.

The power tool most likely to be used for vegetation clearance is the polesaw, which is normally used to take down branches up to about 10 feet or to fell small trees. In either case the maximum diameter that should be cut is about 4-6". A chainsaw helmet, gloves and safety glasses must be worn when using the polesaw.

Brushcutters are also used to clear brambles, but they should not be used to cut back branches, as the finish they leave is unacceptably poor. When brushcutting, a clear visor must be worn, not a standard chainsaw helmet.

Chainsaws should only be used by qualified people wearing full protective equipment, and even they should not fell any mature trees without first speaking with the task supervisor.

Health & safety on mowing and brushcutter tasks

The main tools used for these tasks are brush cutters and powered reciprocating scythe bar mowers.

Both of these, although intimidating at first, are quite safe if used in accordance with the instructions given by your task supervisor who will train you in their use on your first mowing task.

However, there are a few points that you should bear in mind:

Vibration: Both mowers and brushcutters vibrate a fair bit in normal use. Therefore you should not use one for long periods without either taking a break or changing roles with one of the other volunteers (about 2 hrs is a reasonable maximum). You should not operate them if you have previously suffered from Vibration Induced White Finger (VIWF), sometimes also known as Hand/arm Syndrome. In this case, it is best to avoid mowing tasks, as there is limited alternative work to be done.

The approaching public: You will be wearing ear defenders while using these machines so it is important that you regularly look around you and remain aware of your surroundings. If any members of the public do approach, please stop the machine until they are past. It is also important to remain aware of where other volunteers are and to keep a safe working distance from your colleagues.

Fuel safety: These machines run on petrol which is, of course, flammable. Therefore, you should be careful when refuelling to keep away from any sources of ignition (such as a hot exhaust).

The riverside: When working on the Thames Path you will be working close to the river edge, and therefore be constantly aware of where the bank is at all times, as it is vital that you and the equipment stay on dry land. You may also be instructed to wear a lifejacket if the task supervisor feels the conditions warrant it. If any equipment does fall into the river you should not attempt to retrieve it alone. The task supervisor must be told immediately.

Hogweed: Giant Hogweed has a caustic sap which can cause burns if it gets on your skin or in your eyes. For this reason, we advise that everyone involved in brushcutting wear long sleeves, wear a fastened top and gloves, regardless of how hot it is. It is also essential to wear the plastic face shields

provided. A chainsaw hat with mesh visor does not provide adequate eye protection.

If you do get splashed with Giant Hogweed sap, don't panic. Tell your supervisor straight away and wash the affected area with plenty of water. Avoid rubbing the affected area however much it itches as bursting the blisters can cause permanent scarring.

Health & safety on fencing, signing & gate installation tasks

The majority of the health & safety considerations on these tasks are already covered in the general section (e.g. safe lifting & safe working distances). Apart from these considerations, there are a few other risks to bear in mind:

Post bangers: If you are using the post banger (aka the drival) or holding the post for someone who is, you must wear a hard hat.

When working with mells or sledge hammers you must ensure a firm footing on the ground. Don't be tempted to climb onto fences in order to gain extra height and force, as it is not worth the risk of injury.

Underground services: When digging holes, there is always the risk of encountering buried pipes and cables. Therefore, you should take your time, and if you encounter a layer of sand or yellow hazard tape stop immediately and inform your task supervisor. Where there is a pronounced risk, and where necessary, we use a cat scanner to check the area before work commences.

Eye protection: When using the Kango to smash through rock or concrete, or when using the drill to cut mortices in signs, effective eye protection must be worn. This can either be a strimmer visor (when ear defenders are also required) or a pair of safety glasses (sunglasses and normal spectacles are not sufficient).

Shuvholders: These are also known as "knuckle crackers" which gives you a good clue to their risk. During use, care must be taken not to whack your knuckles together when closing the spades. You also need to be careful not to trap your head between the handles! This may sound comical, but it can be far less funny when it happens to you.

Concrete, paint & chemicals: It is wise to try and avoid getting cement, paint or any other chemicals on your skin. Wear gloves when using these substances and eye protection if instructed by your task supervisor. Wash off any splashes immediately.

"Kango" and generator: We have a Kango type breaking tool (ours is actually made by Erbauer) and accompanying generator. You should not use these until given full instruction by the task supervisor. Ear and eye protection i.e. a strimmer helmet, should be worn when operating the machine.

Tespa banding: This is the steel banding which we use to put up fingerposts in urban areas, and you will be given full instruction on how to do it by the task supervisor. The cut ends of the banding can be sharp, and gloves should therefore be worn for this task.

Holes in the ground: When you are digging holes, do remember where they are, make sure they can clearly be seen and try not to inadvertently step in them. This may sound obvious, but such mishaps are one of the biggest causes of injury during countryside work.

Information for workshop volunteers

As a workshop volunteer you will play an important role in maintaining and improving the trails by using your woodworking skills to make and/or repair signs gates, information boards, waymarkers and other furniture.

Location: Most of our workshop volunteering takes place at our offices in Eynsham. Occasionally we may ask workshop volunteers to help out at other locations, for instance if there is a complicated structure being installed on one of the Trails. There is also the potential for you to carry out simple tasks such as painting signs in your own home or workshop. Please speak to our Project Coordinator if you are interested in this option.

Task diary and how to book: We are still in the process of fitting/sorting our new workshop and training staff in new equipment. However, there will generally be at least one workshop task per month, and will be shown in the task diary. Please phone us on 01865 810211 once you have decided on the tasks that are of interest.

Before your first task: Before you attend your first task, you should ensure that you have told us if you have any relevant medical conditions, given us contact details for your next of kin and have had a tetanus shot within the last 5 years. The registration form for this information is at the back of this pack, and it is important that you fill it in and return it to us. You should also read all the Health & Safety guidance.

What to wear/bring: You should wear close fitting clothing that you don't mind getting dirty, Health & Safety compliant shoes/boots, and bring a packed lunch. Be aware that although you will be working inside, the workshop can get quite cold in winter, and therefore it's advisable to dress appropriately.

On your first task you will be given a volunteer t-shirt and cup. Please wear/bring these to all future tasks.

The work: There are eight basic tasks which make up the bulk of our workshop volunteering, though there is also scope for other work on occasion. They are:

1. **Making signs for The Ridgeway** – This involves using a powered mitre saw and router. The material used is normally ecodeck, a dense black plastic material made from recycled milk bottles. It cuts and works roughly like wood, although unlike wood it doesn't have any grain issues.
2. **Making signs for the Thames Path** – As above but working with English Oak. This is a fairly rare task, as many of our Oak signs are made by Landmark Signs of Chippenham.

3. **Morticing posts to take fingers** – This involves the use of a morticing machine working in either ecodeck (Ridgeway) or Oak (Thames Path).
4. **Making waymarkers for the Thames Path** – Working in Oak, this involves the use of a router/router graph and a pillar drill with forstner bit.
5. **Painting signs and waymarkers** – Using a drill mounted wire brush, and/or a dremel type tool, old paint is stripped off. Primer and plasticote or japlac paints can then be applied to colour lettering arrows and acorns. We are also looking at the use of resins to fill routed signs, but have yet to find a cost effective solution.
6. **Making/repairing gates** – Working with either Oak or softwoods, the task will include use of the mitre saw, band saw, pillar drill and morticer.
7. **Making information boards** – This involves using a range of hand tools and handheld power tools, plus the mitre saw, working in either ecodeck or hardwoods.
8. **Making benches** – This involves using a range of hand and power tools, as well as the mitre saw, saw table, band saw, pillar drill and morticer working in either ecodeck or hardwoods.

In addition to these general tasks, our workshop volunteers sometimes have other work to do, such as making step frames for installation on-site, refitting the workshop and making equipment for other volunteer tasks.

Health & Safety for workshop volunteers

Workshop tasks are overseen by a member of staff who will provide all necessary training on machine use etc. Therefore, details do not need to be given here. However, there are some general considerations to bear in mind:

Loose clothing, hair & jewellery: Serious injuries can result from loose items becoming caught in the spindles of spinning machines, such as the morticer, drill or saw. Therefore, we ask all workshop volunteers to avoid wearing jewellery or loose clothing such as ties and scarves, and if you have long hair to tie it back.

Dust: Serious respiratory problems can result from breathing in wood dust. A dust extractor should be used whenever working on wood in the confines of the workshop. Ecodeck produces waste as chips not dust, and therefore a dust extractor is not needed, although it is useful for clearing the chippings afterwards.

Power tools: it probably won't come as a surprise that saws, drills, routers, morticers and other tools are sharp and can inflict injuries if used incorrectly. Therefore you should not use any of our power tools until you have been

instructed in their use, or without the safety guards being in place. All our machinery is fitted with NVR switches and the machines should be switched off before any bits or blades are changed or adjusted. Push sticks should be used where instructed on the bandsaw and table saw.

Be aware that, particularly when working in Oak, both the router and morticer bits can become extremely hot, and they should be allowed to cool before being handled.

Fire safety & workshop tidiness: It is important to keep the workshop as tidy as possible, and to regularly clean up after yourself so that piles of flammable chip/dust/off cuts do not accumulate. If you are using any solvents, (such as primer) work must be carried out outside away from any sources of ignition. Painting should only be done at the dedicated bench in the sign store.

Personal protective equipment: Appropriate eye and ear protection should be worn whenever using any powered machine. We have a range of ear defenders, safety specs and integrated visors available. As a rule, gloves should always be worn when there is a risk of harm. However, when cutting or drilling, the hand operating the machine should remain gloveless in order to give as much finesse as possible.

Safe lifting/manual handling: Our workshop tasks can involve moving some quite heavy material around, (such as 4"x4" oak posts). You should always get someone to help move heavy items and also make sure you have a firm grip. Bend your knees while lifting, not your back, and try to keep the weight close to your body. If you are using our morticer, bandsaw or pillar drill, you should use the roller stands provided to support the end of the post not on the machine.

First aid & emergencies: A first aid cupboard and eyewash station is mounted on the rear wall of the workshop, while two extra kits are carried in the van. Your task supervisor is a trained first aider.

Information for Monitors

We rely on reports from our monitor volunteers to let us know what is happening on the trails. The feedback helps us to respond quickly when hazards occur, keeping the trails safe and enjoyable to use.

Equipment: When you register as a volunteer, you will be sent an A3 laminated map of your section, a set of A4 report forms (with maps on the reverse), a set of freepost envelopes, car sticker, cap and volunteer t-shirt. If you have requested a littler picker this can be collected from our offices.

Working together: Our aim is to ensure that each of the sections of trail have two monitors assigned to it. This is to ensure continuity of cover if one person leaves, goes on holiday etc. Where sections do have two monitors we encourage them to work together or at least share information to avoid duplicating reports. However, the Data Protection Act means that we cannot give your information to anyone without your consent or vice versa.

What to report: As well as checking all the furniture along your stretch, you should also note any overhanging vegetation, fallen trees, damage to the path surface or bank erosion. (Thames Path only).

You only need to report each problem once. We take all reports seriously, but have to prioritise work along the length of both trails according to its urgency. Therefore, it may take a little while before we get round to fixing a problem that you have reported. If it is going to take a long time to fix, if it is not our responsibility or if we are not going to repair it for any other reason, then you will be given appropriate feedback by our administration assistant.

When carrying out your checks remember that the trail has a number of different users, and you should try to put yourself in their position when looking for issues and defects. For example, horse riders on bridleways and byway sections will require a higher clearance (normally 3m) than that provided on footpaths. Similarly, those with mobility issues, such as those in wheelchairs and parents with pushchairs might be more affected by uneven surfaces and/or small obstructions than you are. If you would like further guidance on the kinds of user you should take into account for your section, please contact your project coordinator on 01865 810211.

Specific things to look out for are:

Signs & waymarkers: On The Ridgeway these are made from Ecodeck – black recycled plastic – while those on the Thames Path will be oak in rural areas, and either metal or polycarbonate in urban areas. All signs and waymarkers:

- Should be upright and held firmly in place
- Should be clear of overhanging branches and vegetation (if minor, please cut back if it is safe to do so)

- Should be easy to read and clear of graffiti. If certain parts of the sign need repainting, please indicate which letters are needed (so that we can assess the scale of the job). If damaged, please indicate which part of the sign needs replacing.

Gates/stiles: The main thing is to check that all part of the gate/stile is still in-situ and that the gate opens/closes effectively. Upright posts should be secure in the ground.

Check and ensure that all latches are in good working order. The structures should be clear of overhanging/encroaching vegetation and in particular be aware of prickly, stinging or poisonous plants which could be a hazard to users. Also, bear in mind that pushchairs and wheelchair users will be closer to the ground than someone standing.

Vegetation: The trail should have a corridor/tunnel clear of encroaching vegetation and overhanging branches of the following minimum dimensions:

Footpath: 2.5m height 2.0m width
 Bridleway/byway: 3.0m height 4.0m width

Surface: Has the surface deteriorated significantly since your last monitoring report? In particular, are there any potholes which are more than 2” deep or more than 24” across? If there has been recent damage, please give a full description of damage and location.

Litter: If litter is present which you can’t or don’t want to clear yourself please report both location and quantity to us. If you have cleared litter from your section, please report it to us regardless.

Travellers: Record the date you first noticed their presence, (then report) and the date you noted that they had gone. Give approximate numbers of vehicles/caravans. Are there any loose or dangerous animals with the travellers? Describe the state of the trail after they have left.

Monitors are not expected to approach travellers – just to report their location to the offices.

Obstructions/fallen trees: State the type of obstruction and whether or not the trail is completely blocked or still passable. In the case of fallen trees, please tell us whether they are on the ground or “hung up” and give us an approximate diameter of the trunk.

If there are small obstructions, such as stones, small branches etc which could be a hazard to wheelchairs, pushchairs etc please move these to one side if it is safe to do so.

Abandoned vehicles: Along with the date of monitoring, please record number plates if present and whether the vehicle still has a tax disc. Let us

know about any damage to the vehicle (as this may indicate if we are dealing with a stolen or dumped car) and in particular, if the vehicle still has wheels (we often have to tow these vehicle to the roadside, so this information is critical). State whether or not the vehicle has a "Police Aware" sticker. Let us know if the vehicle has done other damage to the trail, and surroundings, such as rammed signs, broken fences or trees damaged by a burning vehicle.

Note that you should not touch burnt out vehicles, as acids created by the oxidised paint can burn your skin.

If a burnt out vehicle has been removed, let us know whether remaining glass/metal has also been cleared.

Restricted Byways/TRO sections (Ridgeway only): 4x4s, cars and motorbikes should not be using the restricted byway sections (or bridleway/footpath sections) at any time of year. Nor should they be using the byway sections that are subject to TROs (Traffic Regulation Order) between the beginning of October and end of April. If you see any vehicles which might be violating this, please record the registration number, make and model, the time and date and the direction of travel then report these to the office as soon as possible. These reports will be forwarded to the regional police contact for further investigation.

River banks: Report a bank collapse or erosion when it is intruding into the footpath, unless the path is through open meadowland.

State whether the width is restricted (e.g. by fence or hedge) or unrestricted and the user can move past the bank problem easily. As well as reporting how far into the trail the collapse extends. Also note the length of the path it affects. Please report areas of the path that have an adverse slope (normally as a result of being undercut) which could be a hazard to wheelchairs, pushchairs etc and let us know about major collapses (those that encroach the actual path) straight away, rather than waiting for your monthly report.

Additional hazards: Whilst monitoring, please record any additional hazards for walkers/cyclists/riders that you encounter which are not covered by the previous guidance e.g. barbed wire, rabbit holes etc.

Illegal activities: If you see any activities that you think are illegal (e.g. raves, harecoursing, wildlife crimes etc) please report directly to the police but do keep us informed.

Making your report: When you find a problem, defect or issue, describe the problem in the appropriate box on that month's monitoring form and mark the position with the corresponding problem number on the map on the reverse.

Try to give us a decent amount of information for each problem, as well as a photo if possible, so that we can go to the site knowing what needs to be done to resolve it without going out there first. For example, if a sign is damaged,

let us know which fingers have been torn off (if you look around, they may be lying nearby) or if a gate is damaged, tell us which parts/rails need replacing.

If you are reporting fly-tipping, try to give us a factual description of how much there is and give us a rough idea of how many large items there are and what they are. If this isn't feasible (as with a big pile of garden waste) tell us how many wheel barrow/van loads you think there are.

Finally, please ensure that your report is legible. This means that if you have been monitoring in the rain, you may need to make a fair copy to send to us.

Reports should be sent to us every month in the Freepost envelopes provided. If you wish to file your report by email, please ask the Administration Assistant, as report forms can be provided as DOC files and maps in JPEG format. If you have nothing to report, then it is sufficient to either ring or email us, rather than wasting a report form. However, we do still need to hear from you, so we know that the path has been checked.

Health & Safety for volunteer monitors

Particular Health & Safety precautions for this role are limited. However, there are some general considerations to bear in mind.

Lone working: If you are going to be monitoring alone, please let someone know where you are going and when you intend to return, so that they can come and look for you or alert us and the emergency services if you fail to return.

Weather: As your section only needs to be walked once a month, there should be no need to monitor in really bad conditions. However, you should still be prepared, and take waterproofs or a sun hat as the weather dictates.

Flooding: If your section of the Thames Path or the riverside sections of The Ridgeway is flooded, do not walk it. It is better to miss a month's monitoring than to put yourself at risk. Even relatively shallow waters can pose a significant risk, especially when there is a current.

Burnt out vehicles: As mentioned above, chemicals in the oxidised paint of burnt out vehicles can react with the moisture in your skin to form hydrofluoric acid, which can cause severe burns. Therefore, do not touch them. If you do suffer such burns, rinse them immediately under plenty of running water and seek urgent medical attention.

Confrontations: Your role is to observe and report, not to police the trail. Therefore you should avoid getting into confrontations with anyone. If you see anyone committing a crime, please call the police at once. Do not try to prevent them yourself.

Litter picking: If you choose to litter pick your section of the trail, we will issue you with a litter picker and a pair of work gloves. Please use these and avoid picking litter up with your bare hands.

You should not attempt to remove any of the following – please report them to us for professional removal instead: hypodermic needles, clinical waste (normally in clearly marked yellow or green bags), any form of flytipping, chemical containers or barrels, anything which is in the river or down steep banks or anything which is too heavy for you to lift on your own and carry comfortably. It is important that no member of the public is requested to help with any task, as they will not be covered by our insurance.

Information for Administration/Research volunteers

As one of our admin and/or research volunteers, you will play an important role in keeping our literature and website up to date and ensuring that all our staff have the information necessary to do their jobs effectively.

The roles: There are two roles within this opportunity which are:

Basic administration: Our basic administration volunteers come into the office at Eynsham when needed (usually one or two days per month), to help with various tasks such as preparing mail outs, sorting batches of leaflets for dispatch and laminating posters. As our team is predominantly field-based, we sometimes set up a rota of admin volunteers to answer the phone, take messages and sort the post for times when both the Information & Administration Officer and Administration Assistant are away from the office.

Our administration volunteers are required to sign a simple confidentiality agreement due to having access to National Trails files and data, and can be found in the appendix of this document.

Under normal circumstances, it will be the Administration & Information Officer who contacts our administration volunteers to arrange their days. Travel expenses can be claimed as detailed in Section 1.3, and a maximum travel radius of 25 miles applies.

Website proofreaders: A home based opportunity that requires you have a computer and Broadband connection. Our volunteer website proofreaders are responsible for reporting any mistakes or broken links on the pages for both trails. If any errors are found, please take a screenshot of the page (by pressing Alt and Print Screen), paste into a Microsoft Word document and send to the Information & Administration Officer for action.

Health & Safety for Administration volunteers

If your volunteering involves coming into the offices at Eynsham, you will be given an induction, including procedures for fire evacuation etc.

Section 3: Volunteer policy

This policy sets out the principles, practices and procedures with which the National Trails office will follow in the recruitment, training and support of volunteers.

This policy:

- Formally acknowledges that volunteers can make a considerable contribution to our work and objectives and that volunteering can offer significant benefits to volunteers themselves.
- Ensures that volunteers will not be used to replace paid workers.
- Confirms that the National Trails team is firmly committed to diversity in all areas of work. Volunteering opportunities with the team are open to anyone, regardless of gender, disability, ethnic origin, religion or sexual orientation but may be restricted by the nature of the work.

All volunteers:

- Must be over the age of 18.
- Should declare if over 70 years of age.
- Will be issued with a Volunteer Information Pack.
- Will be fully supported by the Project Coordinator and National Trails Assistant.
- Will be asked to give next-of-kin contact details in case of an emergency.
- Should provide information about any significant medical conditions that may restrict any activities carried out, or which should be known to the emergency services in the case of an accident.
- Should perform their duties in a civilised and reasonable manner.

Volunteer recruitment

New volunteers are recruited through a number of different channels, including:

- Poster campaigns on the Trail
- Posters in libraries and other community facilities
- Radio adverts and other local press
- Via the National Trails website

Following an initial expression of interest from a potential volunteer, they are asked to complete a registration form including contact details, interests, experience etc.

There is no formal interview or selection process but prospective volunteers can have an informal chat with the Project Coordinator at any time to discuss the scheme.

All new volunteers receive our Welcome Pack, entered on the volunteer database and are automatically covered by Oxfordshire County Council insurance while out working for the organisation.

Health and Safety

The National Trails Office has a duty of care to assess any risks to which volunteers are exposed and to ensure that they are reduced to an acceptable level. All volunteer tasks have been risk assessed by the National Trails Team and the risk assessments are reviewed annually. Prior to a task volunteers will be briefed of any potential risks and the procedures involved in reducing or eliminating those risks.

All volunteers are provided with Health and Safety guidance and are required to sign a form to confirm that they have read this before their volunteering commences.

The National Trails Assistant is fully trained in First Aid and a First Aid box is carried in the works vehicle at all times. Volunteers must complete a registration form with their personal details including the contact information for a relative or other person who they wish to be informed in the case of an emergency.

Only those volunteers qualified to do so (NPTC CS30 + CS31) may use chainsaws on tasks and these volunteers are requested to send a photocopy of their certificates to the Project Coordinator to be kept on file. Volunteer chainsaw operators will be required to take a refresher course every 5 years.

Insurance

All National Trails Volunteers are covered by Oxfordshire County Council Employers Liability Insurance in respect of injury to themselves and Third Party Public Liability Insurance in the event of a claim by a third party arising from the actions of the volunteer.

The County insurers require all volunteers over the age of 70 to be risk assessed individually. This simply involves passing on personal health details to the County insurers to confirm that an individual's health does not conflict with the work that they are doing. This information will be treated confidentially.

Equal Opportunities

All volunteers working with the National Trails team will be treated in a manner that is consistent with the Oxfordshire County Council Equal Opportunities Policy. The Council (and the National Trails Team) is opposed to any form of unfair discrimination and will not be unfairly prejudiced by disability, gender, marital or parental status, age, race, colour, nationality, ethnic or national origin, religious belief, sexual orientation or spent offences.

However we may require any volunteer who is experiencing mental health issues or learning difficulties to be accompanied by a support worker or care assistant to enable them to get the most out of their volunteering and to ensure that their health and safety and that of others is not compromised.

Confidentiality Procedure

Personal Information about volunteers will be handled in accordance with Oxfordshire County Council's Data Protection Policy. The National Trails Office will not discuss personal information given to them by volunteers unless:

- It is vital that the information is passed on for safety reasons.
- The volunteer has given prior consent.

Complaints

If a volunteer experiences any problems or issues related to their volunteering with National Trails, it is their responsibility to raise these at the earliest opportunity with the Project Coordinator.

The National Trail staff are happy to receive comments on the scheme and be informed of potential improvements to be made.

Any issues/problems discussed will be treated as confidential.

In the first instance the coordinator will try to resolve the issue by:

- Agreeing with the volunteer any action that will be taken and the timetable for it.
- Meeting with the appropriate staff and volunteers to try and resolve the issue.
- Agreeing a monitoring process.
- Contacting the volunteer to report any action taken and to offer any necessary support.

If either the Project Coordinator or any other National Trails staff member is unable to resolve the issue in this way, if the volunteer is unhappy with the resolution or if the issue is in connection with the staff, further action may be taken following discussions with those involved.

The Ridgeway and Thames Path National Trails Minimum Volunteering Criteria to assess potential future volunteers.

We operate a volunteer scheme to help us maintain both National Trails. We have work objectives to achieve and are accountable to all the Highway Authorities, Natural England and on the Thames Path, the Environment Agency, to achieve this work. Our job, working with volunteers is to ensure the trails are open and available for public use at all times. Working with volunteers, the tasks we undertake include soft vegetation management, (grass cutting during the summer using walk behind reciprocating blade mowers) and hard vegetation clearance (scrub clearance during the winter using mechanical pole saws and other machinery). We do also use hand tools. We undertake other works ranging from replacing towpath gates through to digging out drainage grips. These works are undertaken on areas where the public will be walking or horse riding. The supervisor has the right to terminate the agreement, should we have concerns over volunteer safety, officer safety or safety to the public when carrying out a task.

It is essential for everyone's safety that our volunteers will be able to adhere to the following criteria:

1. Is able to work within a team safely.
2. If carer/support worker is required then they must be present at all times during a task.
3. Is physically able to undertake the tasks.
4. After guidance and tool talk is able to undertake task safely with minimum supervision.
5. Is able to understand and sign off task risk assessments.
6. Is able to work on rough terrain in all weathers, sometimes in isolated rural areas.
7. Is able to drive/meet on site. Due to the isolated nature of some of the tasks away from any roads, we sometimes have to carry tools and materials to the work site. This can be up to a distance of half a mile or more.
8. Dignity at work
Oxfordshire County Council are committed to the provision of a healthy, safe and productive working environment for all our employees, prospective employees and others working in or visiting our premises. Everyone should be treated with dignity and respect at work, and bullying or harassment will not be tolerated. Specific forms of bullying and harassment may constitute offences under discrimination legislation in relation to race, colour, nationality, ethnicity, sex, disability, sexual orientation, religion or belief and gender reassignment. - In accordance with Oxfordshire County Council policy.

Emergency Contacts

Obviously in an emergency dial 999 and ask for the service required, however below are the police contact numbers for the Police forces close to the Ridgeway and Thames Path.

Thames Valley Police **0845 8505505**
Gloucestershire Constabulary **0845 0901234**
Wiltshire Constabulary **0845 4087000**
Hertfordshire Constabulary **101**
Metropolitan Police **101**
Surrey Police **0845 1252222**

Section 4: Forms

Volunteer Registration Form

Health and Safety and Confidentiality Declaration

Volunteer Travel Expenses Claim Form

To register as a volunteer please complete the Volunteer Registration Form and the Health and Safety and Confidentiality Declaration and return them to National Trails Office, Countryside Service, Signal Court, Old Station Way, Eynsham, Oxford, OX29 4TL.



National Trails Volunteer Scheme

Volunteer Registration Form and Health & Safety Information

We are required to confirm the following information from all volunteers who are likely to carry out practical and monitoring work for us. Oxfordshire County Council requires the information for insurance purposes and Health & Safety requirements. Any information you provide will not be used for any other purpose.

Name.....

Address.....

.....

Email:.....

Tel. No. (home)..... (mobile).....

Which of our opportunities are you interested in (please tick)

Practical Tasks	<input type="checkbox"/>	Trail Monitoring	<input type="checkbox"/>	Workshop Tasks	<input type="checkbox"/>	Admin	<input type="checkbox"/>
-----------------	--------------------------	------------------	--------------------------	----------------	--------------------------	-------	--------------------------

Have you had a tetanus injection within the last 10 years? (*If No, please seek advice from your doctor, if you intend to volunteer for practical tasks).

Yes No*

Date of birth..... Over 16 and under 70 Over 70

Details of any relevant medical conditions:

.....
 .

Please provide the name and contact number of someone who can be contacted in case of emergency:

Name:..... **Contact Number:**.....

How did you hear about our volunteering opportunities?

Volunteer centre | National Trail | Poster | Other
 Web site (Please specify)

.....
I declare that the above information is correct.

SIGNATURE.....**PRINT NAME**.....

DATE.....

Please return this form to: National Trails Office, Freepost RSJK-ETAJ-GAJJ, Signal Court, Old Station Way, Eynsham, Witney, Oxon, OX29 4TL or by email to ntvolunteers@oxfordshire.gov.uk any queries please phone 01865 810211.

The Ridgeway & Thames Path NATIONAL TRAILS

Health and Safety and Confidentiality Declaration

Please complete all information and sign all declarations that are relevant to your role.

Name: _____

Everyone

I confirm that I have read and understood the Health and Safety guidance in the relevant sections of this pack and will contact the Volunteers Scheme Coordinator if I have any questions about it.

I confirm that I have read, understand and can adhere to the Minimum Volunteering Criteria.

I confirm that I have informed the National Trails Office of any health issue which may affect my volunteering and will inform them promptly should any such condition arise.

I confirm that I understand that my volunteering does not constitute employment and that nothing in this pack can be said to be or represent a contract of employment.

Signed: _____ **Date:** _____

Practical, workshop and monitor volunteers

I have had a tetanus vaccination in the last ten years or have been advised by my doctor that I am covered by previous tetanus vaccinations.

Signed: _____ **Date:** _____

Administration volunteers

I confirm that I understand that any information I am privy to as part of my volunteering may be confidential and I agree that I will not give, tell, or otherwise impart any of this information to any third party or use this information for any purpose other than that for which I am volunteering.

Signed: _____ **Date:** _____

Volunteer Travel Expenses

Name Month

Address

.....

.....

Date of Journey	Mode of Transport	Location + reason	Car share with	No. of miles

Please continue on reverse of sheet as necessary

<p>Amount claimed (45p/mile for solo car journey, 24p/mile motorbike journey, 50p/mile for car sharing with another volunteer, 20p/ mile for push bike).</p> <p>Please note that each journey is limited to 50 miles round trip or the equivalent cost i.e. £22.50 if travelling by public transport.</p>	
---	--

Signed by Volunteer.....

Authorised by.....

Cheque No..... Code.....NC9800-35100.....

