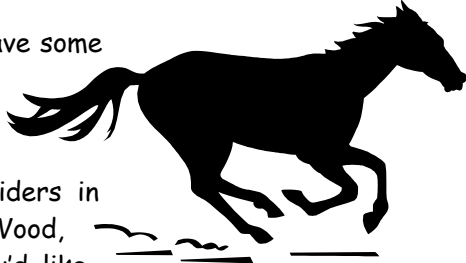


HODGEMOOR RIDER

A possible new bridle-path, new members, some new organisers and some new problems. Certainly worth a few minutes of your time to read this newsletter.

Maybe you have some opinions you'd like to share with other riders in Hodgemoor Wood, or maybe you'd like to offer your help in representing our interests with the various bodies with whom the Hodgemoor Riding Association works.



Much of the information here was communicated at the Annual General Meeting that took place on 1st March at the Reading Room in Chalfont St Giles. But even if you were there we hope you will pass a copy on to other interested parties to encourage them to get involved (and to take up membership).

The riding community in the immediate area of Hodgemoor is as strong as ever: there must be at least two or three hundred horses and ponies within easy hacking distance of Hodgemoor Wood, including well over ten yards. Hodgemoor Wood is one of the few places in the area between Beaconsfield and Amersham where we can get off the roads. We should be working together to preserve and improve this haven.

But membership and activity has dwindled since the Association was started six years ago and our initial efforts must go into increasing the number of members and their awareness of the need to act.

The Good News: A New Bridlepath!

Most of you are probably aware that there is currently only one official bridlepath in Hodgemoor Wood. That's the one we've called The Dips which runs from the corner of Rawlings Lane at Widmer Farm north-west to Bottrells Lane by the old bike pits.

But now, largely due to the work of Brenda Wickham, our local British Horse Society bridle-ways representative, a new bridle-path has been agreed. It starts at the Chalfont St Giles/Seer Green road at Threehouseholds. The picture below shows the view from the road.



It leads to the south eastern corner of Hodgemoor Wood. It's a pleasant route across open fields. It will make the Wood more accessible to riders from Chalfont St Peter and Jordans, and will make a welcome variant to our existing circuits.

The Bad News: a Missing Link!

However, the bridle path stops at the corner of the Wood, and there is no riding trail leading from the bridle path to an existing riding trail. The best link is currently a

footpath only and would need quite a bit of work to make into a riding trail. The new bridle path cannot really start working until the problem of the missing link is solved. The Association could help to get this new route up and running. But first, here's a bit more on Forest Enterprise.

Forest Enterprise

Forest Enterprise leases Hodgemoor Wood from Bucks County Council. It is responsible for maintaining the riding trails and footpaths. It is not responsible for maintaining the bridle path in the Wood: this is up to Bucks County Council. However, in the last three years, Forest Enterprise has not maintained the riding trails at all through lack of funds (thanks largely to the huge drop in timber prices in recent years). Liz Manley (phone 01296 625825) is our local Recreation ranger, and although she has around 80 other woods to look after, she is quite often in our area. She is very keen to help all users of the Wood - horse-riders, cyclists and walkers - to co-operate as fully as possible.

Proposed Changes to Riding Trails

The Forest Enterprise is proposing to close certain riding trails because they have become so boggy as to be nearly impassable. But new trails are proposed which are - bearing in mind the basic soil nature of the Wood - the best adapted to the hard wear imposed by horses, and will hopefully require the least preparation and subsequent maintenance.

You know the picture on this page well. That's the Yellow Brick Road at the South end, in great condition, but the boggy path off to the left isn't. No changes proposed here incidentally. The red and white tape is a reminder that walking and riding in the country is presently prohibited because of the foot-and-mouth disease crisis.

Perhaps the most important closure is of the trail running by the main Bottrells Lane car park. This has really become a bog now, with riders making the bog bigger and bigger by trying to avoid the path itself. The peaty nature of the soil here just does not make it suitable for horses. The proposed new cross path from west to east has for most of its route a hard, gravel base. New circuits round the Wood would be possible, either using this new route or going up to Bottrells Lane past the Charcoal Yard.

And perhaps the most important new trail will be "The Missing Link" to the new bridle path. This was actually a riding trail until a few years ago, but it was closed because one section of it became so boggy. The proposed route does not, however, include this boggy section. There will be just one section that will require a hard base.



We hope that both riders and walkers will support these changes: if they are looked at positively, both riders and walkers are gaining: the walkers will get back paths for their sole use, and riders will get new trails better adapted for their use.

Our priorities. Their funding.

There is so much to be done to improve riding in the wood. Many of the riding trails that the Commission is not proposing to close are in a

bad state needing ditching and a hard base added.

Where do we start?

The general feeling of the meeting on 1 March was that "The Missing Link" was a first priority. It would certainly cost thousands of pounds. We have got a new bridle path: let's get it working, and give us all a new circuit to look forward to. And then maybe we'll motivate more riders to join the Association!

Why the Trails cost so much

Hodgemoor Wood has been classified by English Nature as a Site of Special Scientific Interest and has a very varied soil structure. As a result cheap hardcore cannot be used for trails. Hoggin - a mixture of clay and gravel - has to be used which can cost around £2000 per 100 metres. For the trails to last, they also have to be well prepared before the hoggin is laid. It's worth doing the job well: the Yellow Brick Road which was done about 5 years ago is bearing up very well.

was formed as an official body that the Commission could negotiate with.

How can we raise money?

It was clear from the meeting on 1 March that a permit system is - for the time being at least - not acceptable to riders. It did not work before, and even if permits were much less than the £45 charged previously, policing the Wood is very difficult, as there are so

Forest Enterprise may have some funds, Bucks County Council might help, we could help. So the three of us together could do something.

The role of the Hodgemoor Riding Association

The Association represents the interests of all horse riders who use the public bridle ways, permissive riding trails and local roads in and around Hodgemoor Wood. It does this in co-operation with Forest Enterprise, Bucks County Council, Chiltern District Council, Parish Councils, the Friends of Hodgemoor Wood and any other group concerned with the management and preservation of the Wood.

Hodgemoor Riding Association encourages its members to respect other users of the Woods: unfortunately horse riding seems to have a bad image with walkers and cyclists. We must look quite intimidating from down below! It just needs one rider to create a bad reputation for the whole riding community.

The association was formed in January 1995 in response to a threat from the Forestry Commission that it would close all Riding Trails in Hodgemoor Wood except for the one statutory bridle-way. They claimed that horses were damaging the trails by over use, and that riders were using paths reserved for walkers. However, the Commission agreed to leave the Riding Trails open if an association

many entrances.

We think we should go for some one-off events: a sponsored ride, a bring-and-buy sale for unwanted riding stuff, even a social event without our 4-legged friends.

There are many other funding sources to follow up: Chiltern District Council, the Sports Council, the Lottery, the Groundwork Trust amongst others.

Cyclists have had so much attention recently with the development of their national network for the millennium, it's time riders had some improvements too. This brings us nicely onto.....

Cyclists in the Wood

Since the old bridle path became part of the national cycling network last year, there obviously have been more bikers. And they are here to stay. As a right of way, we cannot prevent them. In theory, bikers are obliged to give way to riders, but many cyclists may not know this. We have approached Sustrans (the civil engineering charity that funded the cycle network), asking if they can put up signs indicating clearly that both bikers and horse-riders use the path.

Please note that cyclists are allowed only on the bridle path in the Wood.

No doubt you have noticed that the mountain bike area, formerly at the northern end of the bridle path, has been moved across the road, which is a great improvement for horse-riders.

Those Ruts

Many riders are anxious about the great ruts cutting across some riding trails and totally obliterating one. The heavy vehicles being used in the fire-clearance project have caused these ruts. The completion of this has been delayed by the very wet winter, but Liz Manley assures us that the ruts will be made good where they cross trails (not elsewhere).



The trail worst affected is actually one of the proposed trails to be closed at any rate.

The Friends of Hodgemoor Wood

Susie Bicknell went on March 9th to a committee meeting of the Friends who represent the interests of walkers in Hodgemoor Wood.

They were on the whole favourable to the proposed trail changes. They said it was very important that the "Missing Link" trail should be made to a high standard, so that horse riders were not tempted to stray. They were also very helpful about other possible sources of funding.

Use your newsletter

Help us make this newsletter as useful as possible. The next issue should carry classified ads (free of charge!). Do you have a horse to loan, spare places in your horse box for some events, some tack to sell? Are you looking for someone to hack with? Just let us know and we'll run your ad.

And if Heather and Judith haven't persuaded you to join on the spot, then please join using the application form attached.

Your New Committee

Marcus Bicknell (Chairman), Susie Bicknell (Secretary), Robin Richards (Treasurer) and Heather Black are all new committee members. Susie is doubling as editor of this newsletter and she can be contacted on 01494 872447 or by e-mail on:

sBicknell@ndirect.co.uk

Terry and Audrey Holbrook, and Judith Broadley who have worked so hard for the Association have very sportingly said they will continue.

Thank you!

Getting to Know You

We are certain there are lots of you out there, and we do need you to support the Association. Heather Black and Judith Broadley will be coming round the yards to find you! Tell them your views on the proposed trail changes, or any problems. You can also tell them the latest yard gossip, why your horse is lame, and maybe give them a cup of coffee! We think good communication between the yards could be a great boost to the Association.

For example, any incidents in the Wood could be communicated quickly through the yards. Ideally, the Association needs somebody from each yard on the Committee, or at least one member from each yard.

**Next Open Meeting: Thursday 26th April 2001 at 8 p.m.
in the Reading Room at Chalfont St Giles (opposite the bakery)**

Hodgemoor Riding Association

MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION - 2001

NAME:

PHONE:

EMAIL:

ADDRESS:

TOWN:

POST CODE:

NAME & ADDRESS OF LIVERY STABLE:

Please send a minimum payment of £5 per person to the Membership Secretary:

Judith Broadley
Tor House
23 Hillfield Square
Chalfont St Peter SL9 ODJ

Tel: 01753 883882

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To help us know what you want, and what you do, please answer the following questions:

1. How often do you hack in Hodgemoor Wood?
Daily / Weekly / Monthly / Other
2. Do you ever cross on horseback the Amersham/Beaconsfield main road by the Magpie Public House to ride up to Coleshill and the roads.?
3. Would you enter a Sponsored Ride in and around Hodgemoor Wood?
Would you be willing to pay a contribution of £20 / £15 / £10 / or more?
4. Would you prefer a Sponsored Ride to take place on a weekday summer evening or a weekend?
(n.b. many riders are already busy most weekends during the spring and summer)
5. Would you support a Bring and Buy sale for riding goods?
6. Would you come to a summer social event?

Thanks!