

FRIENDS OF THE RIDGEWAY



Autumn

2010

NEWSLETTER

RITCHIE'S RAMBLINGS

The Great Stones Way is beginning to dominate my life! Elsewhere you will read about the good progress we are making on this exciting project. One particular part of the development plan is to consult with the communities along the proposed route and this has fallen to me. So far I have made presentations to four Area Boards with the final presentation to the fifth Board taking place about the time you receive this Newsletter. Area Boards were introduced by Wiltshire Council when it became a Unitary Authority and local Parish Councils are represented at the meetings. The Great Stones Way has been warmly welcomed by almost everybody. A number of Parishes have asked me to make additional presentations to their communities and I have happily agreed to do this. So far over 200

Also in Issue 88

Nigel Forward	p3
Great Stones Way	p4
Junior Explorers	p7
Diary	p7
Editorial Postlude	p8
Vale of Bimblequort	p8

Website: www.ridgewayfriends.org.uk

people have heard about our project and I have commitments to address at least the same number in forthcoming meetings. The only concerns expressed so far have come from the residents of Avebury, who already have to contend with a huge number of visitors to their village. We understand and sympathise with their concerns and are meeting various interested parties to discuss how best we can work together to minimise the impact of the GSW upon them.

You should recently have received a letter from me asking you to support the GSW in any way you can but, most importantly, by making a financial donation to the project. It is many years since we asked our members for money and you know we would not be doing so if we could avoid it. The vast majority of the money we require to get the GSW commissioned will come from external funding bodies. However to get access to those funds we need to provide some money ourselves. We have set a target of raising £20,000. Averaged across our membership this amounts to about £40 per member, taking the advantage of Gift Aid into account. If you haven't already done so, please help us by making a donation. Cheques should be made payable to The Friends of The Ridgeway and sent to me at The Limes, Oxford Street, Ramsbury, SN8 2PS. Thank you And now for something completely different! Being your Chairman has involved me in many things but I never imagined it would result in me being part of a team organising a rock concert! On the 9th July 2011, there will be a rock concert at Avebury to raise money for the wonderful Prospect Hospice at Wroughton. But it is a concert with a difference. Most people attending (including some of the musicians) will have walked to Avebury along The Ridgeway, raising sponsorship money by their efforts. There will be two start points for the walkers – for the fittest from Uffington Castle (20 miles) and for the less ambitious from Barbury Castle (6.5 miles). The local Round Table groups are organising the event together with an Avebury based musician, Nick Harper. I will keep you informed of developments as the plans crystallise.

Finally, on a sad note, you will read an obituary to Nigel Forward elsewhere in this edition. I only met Nigel a couple of times but remember him with admiration and affection. I remember

especially sitting with him and his wife in my garden on a lovely sunny day, spending a very pleasant time listening to his stories of the early days of The Friends. We are indebted to his efforts in those early days and we have sent our condolences on behalf of all of you to the family.

NIGEL FORWARD, SECRETARY 1983-1995

Writing an obituary for Nigel would have been difficult, had he not, with characteristic unostentatious efficiency, written it already for the 25th Anniversary of the Friends.

His public career was notable: after leaving Marlborough, he worked at Bletchley Park breaking German codes throughout the War. He joined the Home Civil Service in 1947 until his retirement in 1979, working mainly in the Ministry of Defence and the Department of Employment, with a break on foreign service for three years, 1957-60, with the British NATO Delegation in Paris.

After retirement, came what we should celebrate as a third career fighting for The Ridgeway. Details of this are in the article referred to above which may be found on the FoR website. In essence, Nigel and a posse of ex civil servants organised the Friends and persuaded the Countryside Commission that something must be done to stop the use of a peaceful historic trail for motor sports. The Commission's application for a very limited TRO failed because the Inspector interpreted "conflict" as "carnage" but the case was well argued by the Friends during a longish Inquiry and in the end that lost battle led to a definite victory.

Besides minute taking and record keeping that were a challenge for a successor who had not been trained in Whitehall, I have jollier memories of Nigel: a taste for light verse, the tale of the flammable 2CV, plummeting down a vertical iron ladder from his Bristol garden as a short-cut to the Orchard, learning, (subsequently forgetting), the French for septic tank. John Betjeman condemned civil servants as philistines with "first class brains". Nigel demonstrated he was not entirely right

PG

THE GREAT STONES WAY

Work continues on The Great Stones Way project, following the Committee's adoption of the Feasibility Study findings in May, and the encouraging feed-back from our major potential donors. The first priority for us has been to consult with the local communities along the route, to gauge their reaction to the prospect of walkers traipsing through their villages! Fortunately, the reactions so far have been overwhelmingly positive, and we have received much interest and encouragement, which we are looking to translate into active support. Ian has so far addressed four out of the five interested Wiltshire Area Boards, plus Amesbury Chamber of Trade's Tourism Committee, and is about to get started with a further series of combined parish meetings. Letters of support from the Boards have already been received. We have commissioned design of a new logo, and some new leaflets and other materials to support this communication process; and we are in the throes of setting up a new web-site for the project. The word is spreading fast about the project now, in the Vale of Pewsey and the Avon Valley, and we have had the first mentions in the local Press. We have been delighted to recruit Wendy Tobitt, known to many for her work with North Wessex Downs AONB, to advise us on communications matters.

We received approval of our Expressions of Interest from our two potential LEADER donors, NWD and Plain Action, and from the Landfill Communities Fund, and have been encouraged to move on to the full application stage. This requires us to have complete and final costings in place, with three quotations for all works and supplies, plus letters of support, so our Project Manager, Roger Greasley, has been busily employed getting all this together. A number of minor revisions to the route, reflecting the local advice we are now pleased to be receiving, and advice also from the Council Rights of Way Officers, has naturally impacted on the costings exercise. We have agreed a co-operation framework with Wilts Rights of Way Department, confirming our intention to continue support in the longer term for the Council's maintenance of the trail, through a volunteer scheme and a Local Group. We have also consulted with the World Heritage Site officers at Avebury and Stonehenge, who have helped us to develop our policy as to the

potential archaeological and environmental impacts of the path and all the expected traffic along it, and are also seeking advice from National Trust experts on management of sensitive paths, and the precautions we should take. We intend of course to observe the best practice in every way, as you would want us to.

We were delighted to receive a really excellent report, and a wealth of photos, from Roger Griffin on his walk with friends over the first (or final) section of the planned trail, from Old Sarum to Stonehenge. It was obviously a beautiful day for the walk and Roger got some really great photos. We've been pleased to put these up on the web-site, and if you haven't seen them yet you should log on and have a look. We're waiting impatiently for the next instalment; but in the meantime Janet Hierons, our trusty Membership Secretary, has started a walk in the other direction, from Avebury, and has sent in some equally great photos of the northern end of the trail. I hope that these efforts will inspire many more of you to explore the route, and to let us know how you get on.

The Fund-raising Campaign

We have been overwhelmed by the generous response from so many of you to our Chairman's appeal for donations in support of The Great Stones Way project. To date, we have received cheques from 53 members, in amounts ranging from £3 to £500 (thanks once again, Richard!), and totalling the grand sum of £2,500. The appeal is on-going, and we do hope that those of you who have not contributed will feel moved to do so when you can. Our members' support is not only the core of our campaign, but is the bed-rock on which our efforts must be based, and we would like to feel that everyone of you is behind us!

However, we shall of course be seeking financial support from a much wider base too. Your Secretary is devoting as much time as he can to identifying and applying to potential donors, including private Trusts, and the various Community trust funds in Wiltshire. We hope to approach a number of potential donors beyond our membership, who may be interested to support the initiative. One possibility we are considering is to offer naming and dedication rights to features and furniture on the trail, such as gates and sign-posts, or hills and views, and we'd be glad to know

from you if you think this could be of interest. There is a similar scheme operating in the Chilterns, Donate-a –Gate, which has funded 300 kissing gates already!

Our first priority now is to set up a web-site, as already noted, which will be available to anyone seeking information about the project and/or intending to walk the route. The site will contain an appeal for donations and provide a secure link to JustGiving, as well as an address for cheques. It will also of course appeal for new memberships. There will be news of progress of both the project and the campaign, and of fund-raising events, details of the route and a wealth of images of the route itself and of views from the path. We plan also some expert articles about the path's environment, the monuments and other sites along the way, the geology, the landscape and the ecology, which we think will be of general interest. Linked with the site will be a Supporters digital Newsletter, sent out by e-mail to all who express interest in the project, donors and local people. Of course, we hope that this will "go viral" and will help bring in the donations! We hope to get this initiative started by Christmas. All of you who send us donations should receive these, and please let us know if you don't start to receive them.

We really, desperately, need some help from a team of two, three or more volunteers, with a bit of time to spare, to help operate and manage the web-site, compile and distribute the Newsletter, and help with our communications generally. Previous experience is not necessary, although helpful, and training will be given! Please do help!

The main event and centre-piece of the campaign will be our Inaugural Walk, led by Ian our Chairman, and provisionally planned for Saturday, 26th March, 2011. For those unable to join Ian for the full 28 miles from Avebury to Stonehenge, there will be a shorter but still challenging, 13-mile walk from Casterley Camp up on the Plain, then along the Avon Valley; and a shorter walk over the glorious, 3.5 mile stretch up to Stonehenge itself. We'll write again with the details later, asking for bookings, but do please let us know now if you definitely plan to join us. We hope that as many walkers as possible, both members and others, will come along, and that you will seek sponsorship for your efforts from everyone you know! A JustGiving page will be provided for you for his purpose. We're hoping that this will not only raise lots of money for the project but will also be a fun occasion for us all!

You may also like to know, by the way, that Help for Heroes is running a Hero Walk (and run!) from Avebury to Stonehenge on 26th June, 2011. We're keen to support our disabled servicemen and women (a cause close to Ian's heart!) and had planned anyway to suggest to them a Great Stones Challenge, in aid of service charities. We're hoping that they will run their

event again over the new trail next autumn, taking advantage of the disability access that we plan to provide on The Great Stones Way. We're planning to compile, before the inaugural walk, a pocket guide booklet, mainly for sale as a fund-raiser, through the web-site and local shops. We hope that this will prove popular, and will also help spread awareness of the walk and boost membership.

We're also looking into the possible commissioning and sale of some select items of clothing, suitable for walkers, with the new Great Stones Way logo. We hope that these will be available before the inaugural walk, and that many of you joining the walk will want to wear them! There may also be some new correspondence and greetings cards on offer, that we hope you will want to buy.

Finally, for now, we're starting to plan for an exhibition of information about The Great Stones Way and the features along the route, the monuments, archaeology, landscape, history and the environment generally. We're hoping for some separate grants to help us create this, and are seeking help from the local experts. We plan to show this initially in towns in the neighbourhood, to publicise the route and help with sales, recruitment, etc, but intend that it will eventually become a long-term interpretation centre at a suitable location somewhere along the route, appealing particularly to school parties and to younger walkers.

Jeff Goddard

RIDGEWAY JUNIOR EXPLORERS

There is a new page on our web site. The Ridgeway Junior Explorers page is aimed at encouraging children to take to The Ridgeway with their parents, teachers and group leaders in order to discover and enjoy it in all its amazing glory. The page will be regularly updated and will focus on points of interest along the Trail together with seasonal information. It is hoped that it may also inspire inclusion of The Ridgeway and its history in relevant school and group project work. If you have any suggestions or ideas for the page please do let us know.

FOR THE DIARY

AGM: 20th March

TOUR of the Marcham/Frilford

**excavations: Wednesday 20 July 2011 at
11.00**

POSTLUDE

After this issue of the Newsletter, I am laying down the blue pencil; time has come for a fresh mind with a new formula. Not that the font of inspiration has run dry: "Steam Farming in the Vale", "Chalkland Snails – a spotter's guide", "Richard Jefferies: Lower Middle Class Warrior" are on the spike – but you are due a change from an editor whose notion of History some may regard as Current Affairs (Steam engine ? Where do you put the antlers?)

Serendipity, the muse of my devotion, has tossed me a final gift blending prehistoric speculation with contemporary observation.

A MEERKAT? AN INVERTED OSTRICH? A BIMBLEQUORT FROM THE PLANET ZORG?

The most facetious time wasters on the Guardian website responded to a letter in the *Veterinary Record* where Olaf Swarbrick proposed a canine model for the Uffington White Animal "it seems that it is not a horse at all: the tail and head are wrong for a horse and more suggestive of a dog. It appears more like a large hound at full stretch. I thought it may be a greyhound, but an anthropologist suggests it is a wolfhound, which (assuming it is not a horse) makes more sense."

Recent investigations made it clear that the original figure at Uffington had changed down the centuries. Whatever it was once upon a whenever, the old verse gives us an inkling how it may have morphed.

*The owld White Horse wants zettin to rights
And the Squire hev promised good cheer,
Zo we'll gie un a scrape to kip un in zhape
And a'll last for many a year*

**Correspondence for the Winter Issue which is in effect
the Annual Report should be sent to
ridgewayfriends@googlemail.com
by the end of January
("ridgewayfriends@aol.com" will soon be switched off)
Items for the website are gladly received at any time**

The Friends of The Ridgeway is a registered charity (No 1107926): its objects are the preservation for the benefit of the public of all the natural aspects and features of the Ridgeway National Trail and the provision of recreational and educational facilities in the interests of social welfare for the public benefit