

FRIENDS OF THE RIDGEWAY



Autumn

2002

NEWSLETTER

RITCHIE'S RAMBLINGS

Ridgeway Forum disappointment - your help needed soon!

After the excellent progress reported in previous Newsletters, it is disappointing to tell you of the outcome of the recent Ridgeway Forum. This is a meeting at which the Ridgeway Management Group (representing The Countryside Agency, the National Trails Office and the councils along the route of The Ridgeway) informs a representative cross section of Ridgeway user groups of their plans for the Trail. It is supposedly 'consultation' but in the past has been more one-way than two-way!

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<http://website.lineone.net/~friendsofridgeway/>

The Forum meeting held on 24th September was very important as we were promised that we would hear the recommendations of the Management Group following the recent surface audit report. You will recall that this report concluded that over 50% of the surface of the Trail falls below acceptable standards, and on the sections open to motor vehicles this rises to over 70% below standard. We were optimistic that, faced with evidence as clear as this, the Management Group would be recommending some radical changes to address the well known issues.

The meeting was presented with a draft consultation paper, prepared by Mike Furness, the newly appointed Ridgeway Officer. We are extremely disappointed by the approach being recommended. We believe it amounts to a recipe for yet more surveys, assessments, evaluations and experiments. It is singularly lacking in action. We made our immediate views very clear to the meeting.

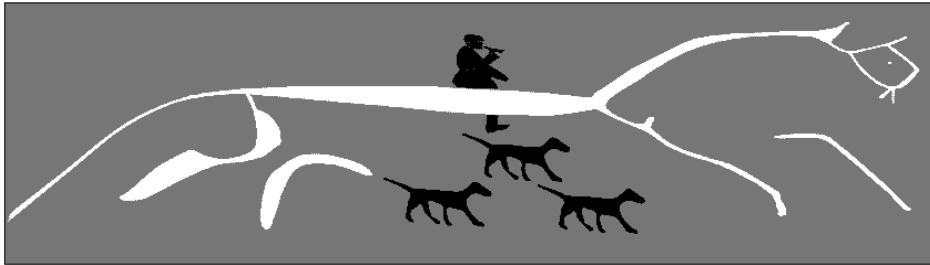
The paper is currently being finalised by Mike Furness to take into account a number of factual issues, but not (it

appears) to reflect the strong views that we expressed on your behalf in the meeting! It will then be reissued to the Forum members and will be posted on the National Trails website (www.nationaltrails.gov.uk) in the week commencing 21st October. If you do not have internet access and wish to see a copy, please call Rebecca Wilson in the National Trails Office on 01865 810224 and ask for a copy to be sent to you.

We will try to let you have a summary of our response to the paper in early November, together with guidance on how to submit your personal views. The public consultation period will remain open until mid-January 2003. In addition a public meeting will be held on 19th November at the Didcot Civic Hall, starting at 7pm and finishing at 9pm.

We urge you to attend the public meeting if you are able and, after the publication of the consultation paper, to submit your personal comments to ensure that your views are considered in the consultation process.

VANDALS DEFACE RIDGEWAY SITES



'The Times' of August 28th 2002 reported that militant supporters of the campaign to save hunting with dogs defaced two white horses, the Kilburn White Horse in the Vale of York and the Uffington White Horse in the Vale of the White Horse, the Oxfordshire Territory of the Old Berkshire Hunt. An image of a huntsman and three hounds was daubed over the Uffington Horse as shown in the figure. The new images are said to be biodegradable, the protestors claimed they would wash off in the rain. A spokesman for the National Trust who care for the site said they would trim the grass as short as possible to try to remove some of the paint, but it has been very dry in that area for several weeks and the grass is growing slowly. The Real Countryside Alliance claimed responsibility for the action. They believe that mainstream countryside campaigners have not been defending hunting interests vigorously enough. They want Government ministers to take notice. There is to be a three-day public hearing on hunting starting on September 9th chaired by the Minister for Rural Affairs, Alun Michael. Bruce Tremayne, chairman of the Oxfordshire group of the Council for the Protection of Rural England (CPRE) said 'Anything like this which defaces the landscape is unwelcome even if it is temporary'.



Another radiophone mast has sprouted adjacent to the earlier one at Gore Hill; this one is taller, thinner and more obtrusive. It can clearly be seen from several miles away at Bury Down Car Park. It is for the 'next generation' of mobile phones, which will be able to display images. However, the Government is thinking of banning

the use of mobile phones while driving, so this one clearly intended to benefit drivers on the busy A34 will soon be making it easier for drivers to behave more dangerously and break the law

A little further west along the Ridgeway, the tumulus at Scutchamber Knob has been badly damaged by motorbikes using it as a playground. They have worn 2 rutted tracks across the mound and caring nothing for the farmer's land they have been driving down the mound to the South and making tyre marks in the newly ploughed earth



DATA PROTECTION ACT

Do you object to the Friends holding your membership record on computer? The data is used for membership records, including subscriptions, and label printing. It is not disclosed outside the Friends. Objections or request for more information to FRmembers@aol.com. Or in writing to the Secretary. 18 Hampton Park, Bristol BS6 6LH

At the moment we have **email addresses** for only about 60 of the 460 members, but probably a lot more have them than we know about. To help the easy and economical administration of the group, members with the technology are asked to e-mail the membership secretary at **FRmembers@aol.com**.

STOP PRESS Vale of White Horse Council has passed a motion supporting the campaign to prevent the inappropriate use of motorised vehicles on the Ridgeway

THE EASTERN RIDGEWAY

*or, with apologies to Laurie Lee,
'As I walked out one midsummer morning'*

I think Laurie Lee's autobiographical account of leaving his village in Gloucestershire as a young man and walking off to the Spanish Civil War has one of the most evocative book titles I know. My long promised walk along the Eastern Ridgeway also meant me walking out one midsummer morning but on a much more modest mission. As I left the village on North Stoke, however, I shared his feeling of closeness to everything and a heightened awareness of my senses. The grass was covered in dew, spiders' webs sparkled, the sun glinted on the Thames, the sound of the birds was crisp and clear and the smell of bacon cooking in one of the cottages was mouth-watering! What a wonderful way to start a couple of days walking the 40 miles of the Eastern Ridgeway.

Detailed descriptions of the route are available in a number of excellent publications, including the one reviewed elsewhere in this Newsletter, so I won't try to emulate them. Rather I will confine myself to a few jottings of things that struck me as noteworthy and hope that they may inspire you to follow in my footsteps.

After the delights of the Thames, there is something slightly spooky about Mongewell Park. Does it have dark secrets in its past? Where do all the roads and paths lead?

Grim's Ditch certainly does have a past and must have been impressive in prehistoric times. Ancient history underfoot, the ramparts and I striding across the countryside for mile upon mile.

Into Watlington for an early lunch at a very pleasant café with the morning papers to read and fascinating snatches of conversation to eavesdrop. "...and then he peed on the curtains." Most disappointed when it turned out they were talking about a dog.

The stretch of the Trail either side of the M40 is in a very poor condition as a result of motor vehicle traffic. It really is as bad as anything on the western Ridgeway. Salutary for me as I always talk about the problems west of the Thames.

The reintroduction of Red Kites in the Chilterns has been a spectacular success. I saw pair after pair wheeling over me as I

walked past Beacon Hill. They are gorgeous birds. Did I read recently that chicks from the Chilterns are now being used to introduce the birds elsewhere in the UK?

The walk past Chinnor was not a highlight. The surface underfoot is so hard that you may as well be walking on a road. Is this what the National Trails Office will wish to do to the whole route to prevent damage by vehicles?

Into Princes Risborough hot and tired, only to find that I have to walk back out again to the station to get a taxi to take me back to my car at North Stoke. All is soon well with the world, however, as I arrive at the best B&B that I know - my mother's!

Off early again and leave the car in a side street in Princes Risborough. I get strange and suspicious looks from the residents, many of whom are setting off to work with brief cases in hand. I don't envy them their day - I wonder if they envy mine?

A real backdoor view of the town as I skirt round rear gardens and garages, but it is soon replaced by the splendid wide open views from the top of Whiteleaf Hill.

Am I being watched? The cameras on the approaches to Chequers seem to be focused on me. Does a lone walker present a threat to the state? Are those farm workers in blue shirts and navy blue trousers *really* farm workers?

I find the monument on Coombe Hill very moving. All those young men from Buckinghamshire who lost their lives in the Boer War. So many, so far from home. I bet most of them had never even been to London before they found themselves fighting for Queen, country and Empire in South Africa.

Walking down into Wendover is what all The Ridgeway should be like - great underfoot and with views that you can appreciate without looking down all the time to make sure you are not about to break your ankle in a rut.

A ploughman's lunch in a pleasant pub in Wendover is fittingly traditional and sets me up nicely for the final stretch.

All the guides to The Ridgeway describe the wonderful beech woods of the Chilterns - they're right!

Crossing the busy A41 reminds me how close The Ridgeway is

to huge centres of population and yet, in two days, I have met only four other walkers who are walking the Trail. This is a most under utilised and under appreciated national asset.

Ivinghoe Beacon is a good spot to finish my walk - glorious views on all sides and a great sense of achievement. I sit on the grass watching children flying their kites against a clear blue sky.

All that remains is to meet my sister for a lift back to Princes Risborough to my car and the journey back to Wiltshire. Not quite like coming back from the Spanish Civil War but it's good to be heading home.

Ian Ritchie

Tour of the Marcham/Frilford Excavations

24 July 2002 This year the weather was much cooler for our tour of the excavations of the 'Hill Forts of the Ridgeway' project; they are still digging in the Vale of the White Horse to try to discover the differences between life on the Ridgeway Hill forts and that of the valley in the area of the old 'Noah's Arc Inn' at the junction of an old Roman road and the busy Wantage to Oxford Road. This year we were fortunate in

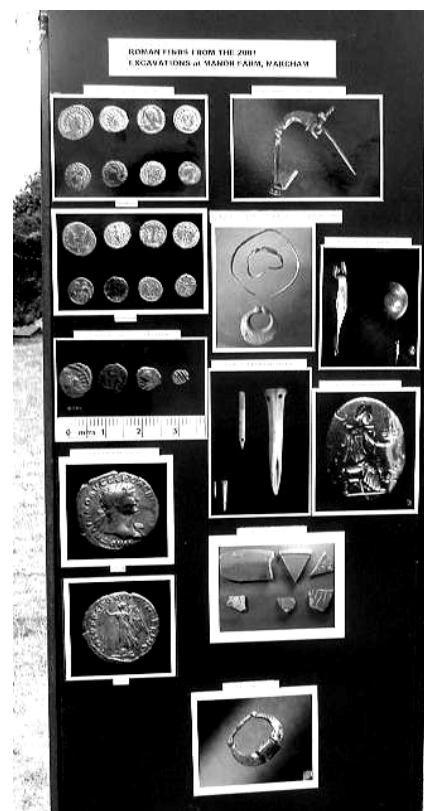
having Dr Gary Lock show us round the site. We were also allowed to park in the field, along the edge of the field well away from the excavations.

As usual about 50 people came to see the fascinating finds. We began by looking at the display board set up for visitors to see the plan of the excavation trenches this year and the 'geophysics' plots which had been used as a guide to where to put the trenches. The owner of the land for the last 25 years is interested in archaeology so has not deep ploughed this field.

The first trench we saw (no 2) showed how valuable this has been in preserving the evidence of former buildings. Foundations of what look like timber-framed buildings are only about a foot below the surface here. Some late Roman coins have been found and visitors from the University of London are trying to date the findings. These buildings were large and possibly were built either side of a 'sacred way'.

In another trench nearer to the River Ock, circular pits and other Iron Age features had been found lying beneath Roman Deposits showing that this site had probably been used since the 6th or 7th centuries

B.C. The excavators had been hoping to find some pottery of a distinctive pattern known as 'All Cannings Cross' which dates from the beginning of the Iron Age. A lot of this pattern had been found at both Uffington and Alfred's Castles, but there was none here, it does not seem to have travelled North of the Ridgeway.



The photo shows enlarged views of some of the artefacts found in this years dig.



A third trench had located the substantial stone foundations of another large building along the 'sacred way'. This building will be excavated further next year.

Dr Lock commented that our visit came at an exciting time. Last year the excavators had thought that the large circular ditch was a games arena where soldiers from a nearby camp were entertained. However, the site is not near any large centre of population, no camp has been found, there is no evidence of benches for the audience and the bank does not seem high enough for people to sit on to watch games in the centre of the arena. This year further excavations have revealed a stone wall curving round as shown in the image Some painted plaster had been found still adhering to the wall in places, in others it had fallen off and was lying on the ground. A few large steps had been found leading to a flat surface at the

bottom as if this had been a sacred pool. A further trench in the bottom had become damp showing there may have been a spring at this point to feed the pool. There is also evidence for a drainage ditch running from the 'pool' towards the nearby River Ock. So it looks as if this whole field was occupied by a set of temple buildings associated with this pool. They will be doing further excavations at this site next year in the hope of confirming their current ideas.

After a picnic lunch Kate and David Crennell led a walk along field paths towards the very quiet village of Garford, now apparently mostly occupied by commuters to nearby Oxford. Unfortunately the bridges across the Ock were in a dangerous state so we could not go as far as we had hoped, luckily there was an abundance of wild flowers along the field edges for us to study. -

Kate Crennell

BOOK REVIEWS

Discovering The Ridgeway
Howard Clarke and Vera Burden

An updated edition of this popular guide to The Ridgeway has just been published. For those not familiar with it, the book has a unique feature - it describes walking the Trail in both directions! Most guides take a West to East perspective, but for those walking in the opposite direction this poses many challenges of interpretation and a degree of speculation in places.

The book comes in a handy size, suitable for slipping into a small pocket, and it is written in a simple, direct and easy to follow style. The sketch maps are bold and clear, but the scale is such

that they show little detail. My personal view is that I would also use the relevant Ordnance Survey maps to give a better appreciation of the features of the countryside I was passing through. There are a number of black and white photographs and useful chapters on the archaeology, natural history and the towns and villages of The Ridgeway, together with some information on public transport. The Friends of The Ridgeway get a mention although the book does not address the problems created by recreational motor vehicles on the Trail.

In summary, an excellent pocket sized value-for-money guide with the real advantage of

covering the route in both directions.

Published by Shire Publications Ltd. ISBN 0 7478 0534 2

Price £4.99 incl p&sp

Discount of £1 if ordered through The Friends of The Ridgeway - write with your order to Ian Ritchie, The Limes, Oxford Street, Ramsbury, Wilts, SN8 2PS

or email

ian.ritchie@ukonline.co.uk

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The Seven Shires Way
Elaine Stone

A 234-mile walk around the county boundary of Oxfordshire using public rights of way. This walking guide is illustrated with fine pen and ink drawings of the points of interest to be seen along the way. It is an A5 sized paperback which could easily fit in a large pocket. It begins with a brief historical introduction on how Oxfordshire came to have the shape it is today. The next page is a useful map with a key to the small maps which illustrate each walk and also lists the names of the surrounding counties. These are copies of parts of the Ordnance Survey maps of the area with the route of the walk highlighted in red.

They do not cover a large area, so if you want to see other points of interest a little further on, you may want to take an additional smaller scale map with you. There are 21 walks, each about 10 miles, but some have possible shortcuts for those who prefer a shorter walk. They start from Moreton-in-Marsh to the northwest of the county, and continue in a clockwise direction round the boundary. Each walk is well documented, beginning with a clear statement of the starting and ending points with their OS grid references. A paragraph describing the main features of that walk follows and then a well laid out set of information on distances, buses, taxis, accommodation, pubs etc. This is probably accurate today, but in future years it would be worth checking whether these establishments are still in business. In my experience pubs near the Ridgeway change hands or close completely with alarming frequency. Even when new landlords take over, as at 'The Harrow' West Ilsley, they may no longer welcome walkers. I cannot be sure about all the transport and accommodation references, I checked those of the walk for Day 14 near where I live, in the village of Chilton, which is about 1.5 miles from the

Ridgeway at Gore Hill via the footpaths. There are no references at all for Chilton, perhaps because the walk does not come this way, but in bad weather you may like to know that you do not have to struggle on further against the prevailing westerly wind. We have a taxi company, a B&B (at the old pub 'The Horse and Jockey'), a pub 'The Rose and Crown' and a Garden Centre, where the restaurant serves light meals. There are also a few buses during the day to Newbury, Didcot and Wantage.

There are copious notes on wildlife and history of the area

through which the walk passes. For those who live in Oxfordshire and might want to try all the walks this book could be good value for money. Those who want walks on or near the Ridgeway will only have 4 of the 21 walks of direct interest.

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 Price £12.95 +£1.50 postage and packing by mail order from: E. Steane, 36 Harpes Road, Oxford OX2 7QL cheques made payable to E. Stearne*

KC

FORTHCOMING EVENTS

Science in Archaeology Those of you who toured the excavations with Dr. Gary Lock in July may be interested in attending a 'Science in Archaeology Lecture Series' organised by Oxford University Continuing Education Department to be held in Rewley House Lecture Theatre on Tuesdays starting at 7.30pm on **15th October** 2002. A series ticket costs £30, that for individual lectures, £6.20. Dr Lock will be speaking on 21 October on 'Seeing beneath the soil: Using geophysics in archaeology'. Details from: the

Administrator, Day & Weekend Schools, OUDCE, 1 Wellington Square, Oxford OX1 2JA Tel: (01865) 270 380 or email: pppdayweek@conted.ox.ac.uk

December 2nd The Richard Jefferies Society

Dr Rachel Hirst *Green or Khaki spaces? Conservation on a Wiltshire Military Training Area* Dr Hirst is a specialist in the conservation and restoration of chalk grasslands. The MoD funded her research into the disturbance ecology of the Salisbury Plain Training Area.

Solve the Christmas card question NOW!

Included with this Newsletter you should receive a **free gift!** We are very pleased with this year's Christmas card, featuring a clump of trees at Barbury Castle on The Ridgeway. It was taken by Fay Godwin, one of Britain's greatest photographers and perhaps best known to you for her superb black and white photographs of The Ridgeway in the book 'The Oldest Road'. We think the only way you can fully appreciate the card is by seeing it for yourself and so we have included a free card for you! If you like it, why not complete the order form now and solve the Christmas card question as well as supporting our campaign?

Incidentally, the photograph also features in Fay's latest collection, Landmarks, which would make a superb present for someone special!

Currently she is consultant ecologist to the Ridgeway Heritage Project.

Arts Centre, Devizes Road, Swindon 7.30 Doors open 7.00 Visitors welcome - no charge

Sunday 23 March 2003 Morning walk before the AGM. The Great Chalk Wood and Thames Path: Start time: 10.30am Start location: SU 600807 (Landranger map 175) Distance: 5 miles

Meet Kate & David in the main car park in Goring.

We walk steadily up into the Great Chalk Wood away from the Thames before turning to come gently down to the Thames path and back to Goring. If time and Sunday services permit we can visit Goring church to see the second oldest bell in Oxfordshire dating from 1290.

Copy for the Spring Issue by 28th December please

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