

FRIENDS OF THE RIDGEWAY
Winter 2003
FR
NEWSLETTER

RITCHIE'S RAMBLINGS

This is a difficult time to write my usual column for our Newsletter. The Ridgeway Management Group published their proposals to address the surface condition problems on The Ridgeway in October and as I write we are coming towards the end of the period of public consultation. I know that many of you have written to express your disappointment with the initial proposals and I sincerely hope that your views will influence the final plans to be issued by the Management Group early in the New Year. I am encouraged by the quality and the volume of the responses submitted by our members

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

And others in favour of a complete ban on recreational vehicles on the Trail

The knowledge that the Parish Councils along the route (who are being consulted on the proposals) are generally in favour of a vehicle ban

The decision by West Berkshire Council to work towards a ban on vehicles on their section of The Ridgeway

The privately expressed views of a number of the members of the Management Group in favour of a ban on non-essential motor vehicles

The growing and very supportive publicity that our campaign is attracting on TV, radio and in the local and national press

A meeting at which the Minister for Rural Affairs, Alun Michael, urged the Management Group to take more decisive action to protect The Ridgeway

On the other hand the only negative experience of the consultation process was the public meeting held in Didcot in November. In a meeting hall

bursting with over 400 people, we were heavily outnumbered by the pro-vehicle supporters. Although I was allowed to get our views across to the meeting, I was roundly booed when I finished!

In a hostile and intimidating atmosphere, a succession of pro-vehicle speakers made a series of predictable points (to loud cheering) whilst a handful of our supporters courageously attempted to redress the balance.

The biggest surprise and disappointment for me was the volte face performed by the representative of the British Horse Society, who put forward the crass idea of hard surfacing the whole of the Trail and allowing motor vehicles to continue to use it. I believe that the BHS performed a similar U turn at the time of the 1992 public inquiry and I am very angry with their behaviour. **If you are a member of the British Horse Society, why not make your views clear to them? Please contact me if you need more information.**

So the difficulty I have in writing this piece is that I am unable to give you a clear indication of how our campaign has influenced the thinking of the Management Group. I must say that I remain very optimistic that the tide has turned in our direction. Even the totally inadequate initial proposals include the application of three Traffic Regulation Orders and three 'voluntary restraint' orders on six sections of the Trail for six months of the year. If, as I suspect, the final proposals are tougher than this then we can regard them as a significant step towards our ultimate goal, a complete ban on non-essential motor vehicles on The Ridgeway.

As if we need any further proof of the necessity of achieving our goal, I went out for a walk on The Ridgeway on Christmas Eve, prompted by a letter I had received from member Rodney Smith of Swindon. I walked up from the start point at Overton Hill and I have never seen this section of the Trail in a worse

state. Around Monkton Down, the path was appalling, with deep ruts, puddles and thick mud across the whole width. Despite the fact that, in the words of the voluntary Code of Respect, 'the surface was vulnerable during and after wet weather', in the space of two hours I was passed by three 4x4 vehicles and one motor bike. They were all doing further damage to an already devastated surface as well as disturbing what should have been a peaceful walk for me and the dogs.

We will endeavour to keep you informed of developments with the revised recommendations of the Management Group as soon as they are unveiled.

Finally, best wishes to you all for the New Year and I hope that in 2003 we take a huge step towards our goal of a traffic free Ridgeway.

Ian Ritchie

NOT JUST ONE ISSUE!

It is easy to forget that The Friends of The Ridgeway is much more than a one-issue campaigning group. Although our current focus is unashamedly on our campaign to ban non-essential motor vehicles from the Trail, we are still active on other aspects of defending and improving The Ridgeway.

It is pleasing to report that we have helped get two inappropriate planning applications overturned. An application to develop a caravan site near Chilton has been turned down and a plan to build

a two storey industrial unit in Manor Road, Wantage (visible from The Ridgeway) has been refused.

Through the initiative of a member, John Savage, we are also working with The Chiltern Society and the National Trails Office to improve sign posting and clarify the definitive route of The Ridgeway near Ivinghoe Beacon.

If you know of any other ways that you believe we can help achieve our aim of 'preserving the true spirit of The Ridgeway', please let us know.

PEWSEY LINK

In its proposals to the Strategic Rail Authority for a West Country franchise, First Group includes regular hourly peak and two hourly off-peak services through Pewsey to Westbury. By providing the improved London service and the western link we said was desirable, this strengthens our

case for making Pewsey the terminus of the Ridgeway. The case is now certainly stronger than the Management Group's question begging response: "we're not doing it because it is our policy not to do it"

Peter Gould

FORTHCOMING EVENTS

Sunday 23 March 2003 Pre AGM

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.

Sunday 4th May Sarsen Trail & Neolithic Marathon

Sponsored walk or run in aid of Wiltshire Wildlife Trust. Details from Elm Tree Court, Long Street, Devizes SN10 1NJ 01380 725670 sarsen@wiltshirewildlife.org

Sunday 11th May Bluebell Walk

2.30 West Woods, Lockeridge near Marlborough. Approximately 4 miles, muddy if wet Meet at CP in West Woods, reached up a metalled bridle track from the village of Lockeridge. OS Explorer 157 GR 152674

Leader: Jane Ebbutt 01672 540368

*Observing the
Code of
Respect - 1*

Bury Down



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Sunday 1st June Chiltern Walk

Meet at the Lions of Bledlow in Bledlow Village for a walk of 6.5/7 miles at 10.30. Parking near Church or telephone box. OS 165 GR 776021

Leader: Roger Lerry 01494 721142

Tuesday 29th July Excavations

11 am A second visit to see the progress of these excavations.

Leader: Dr Gary Lock from the Oxford University Department of Continuing Education

Start Time: 11.00

Length: less than a mile

Meet: The old Noah's Ark Inn, on Wantage Road, A338, in Frilford, Oxon Buses: Wantage to Oxford no.31 roughly every 30 mins, alight at the Garford Turn Grid Ref: SU 438 962

Saturday 9th August Letcombe Regis

Meet at Letcombe Regis Village Hall GR 379 865 at 11.00 am for an 8 mile walk Bring a picnic lunch

The walk will take us up to the Ridgeway near Segsbury hill fort and return via Letcombe Bassett. Light refreshments will be served in the village hall on our return.

Leader Bridget Benn 01235 764661



*Observing the
Code of
Respect - 2*

Gore Hill

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ANNUAL REPORT 2002

This has been an eventful year in which we have achieved much. It is clear that the efforts of your Committee and of individual members have raised the issue of motor vehicle rights on The Ridgeway to a level not seen since the 1992 public inquiry. With the enthusiastic support of our Vice Presidents in the House of Commons and Lord Avebury in the House of Lords we have brought the matter to the attention of the Minister for Rural Affairs, who is now taking a direct interest in it.

The findings of The Ridgeway Surface Audit confirmed what we already knew - that the surface is in an appalling state and that it is much worse on the sections open to motor vehicles. The Ridgeway Management Group published their draft recommendations to improve the surface in October 2002 and they amounted to 'too little, too late'. At the time of writing, the period of public consultation on the proposals has just ended and we await the revised recommendations. We are

optimistic that these will be stronger than in the first draft and we hope to report on this at the AGM. We are very grateful for the tremendous support we have received from members who sent in their comments to the National Trails Office. We believe that there will be some form of motor vehicle control introduced on some sections of The Ridgeway in 2003.

Our PR agent has helped us get considerable coverage in local and national press and on local and national TV and radio.

Organization & Committee

Patron: Chris Bonington
President, Chris Brasher, Vice presidents Michael Ancram MP, MP Julia Drown MP, Paul Goodman MP Robert Jackson MP, Boris Johnson MP, David Lidington MP, David Rendel MP,.

The committee met four times during 2002. The members were Ian Ritchie (Chairman), Peter Gould (Secretary), Anna Hanslip (Treasurer), Kate Crennell (Membership) until the AGM, Jane Ebbutt, Janet Hierons

(Membership) from June and James MacKenzie, until the AGM.

Kate Crennell continued to maintain the website The Newsletter became a quarterly publication

The chairman and members of the committee tended stall at Barbury Castle, Swindon Town Centre

The Chairman gave a talk to the North East Wiltshire Ramblers in November.

The chairman and committee would like to thank the organisers of walks, visits to the racing stables and excavations and all other entertainments over the past year.

Traffic Regulation & Ridgeway Management

The dramatic highpoint of the year was the abandonment of the Code of Respect in which we were supported by the RA, and the CLA

The dramatic low point was the publication of the Surface Standards Report and the Management Group's plan of inaction

There is, however, growing support for the campaign from other official bodies: West Berkshire, Vale of White Horse and Swindon Borough

The Chairman represented the friends at the annual Forum with the Secretary as Observer. He also represented our case at the "surface standards" public meeting in November

The committee is seeking advice on the legal consequences of Restricted Byway status.

Consultations

We have received consultation papers and requests for information from a wide range of bodies: Countryside Agency, National Trails Office, Wilts CC, Swindon BC, West Berks C, Oxfordshire CC, Ramblers, CLA, BHS, CTC, GLEAM and, most copious of all, DEFRA.

Apart from the documents concerning our main campaign, the most significant was the proposal to set up a Trust to manage and promote the National Trails.

Planning

The Friends made representations- some of them successful - on planning proposals at Barbury Castle, Princes Risborough (School Car Park) , Lewknor (Leisure Park) (Hotel) Chilton (leisure park development), Wantage (industrial premises), Watchfield (wind farm), Rutherford

Laboratory (synchrotron etc), and Warren Farm (radio masts)

Ridgeway Extension

The NTO still plainly wants to make the easy mistake of turning Avebury into a honey pot, however nothing has been decided and the Chairman of the Countryside Agency assured us that nothing had been ruled out.

Membership

MEMBERSHIP			
	2001	Change	2002
Individual	126	+44	170
Family	30	+37	67
Life	116	+31	147
Associations	21	+2	23
TOTAL	293	+114	407

In this table, a family membership, counts as 1, however many there are in the family. Likewise, the councils and organisations that support us may have many members.

TheAccounts will be distributed at the AGM

2002 AGM Goring Village Hall

1. Apologies Nicholas Thomas, Lord Avebury, Andy Patterson, Clive Bostle Attendance 73
2. Minutes of 2001 AGM were accepted as accurate
3. Matters Arising None
4. Annual Report The Secretary introduced the Annual Report, corrected the mistaken claim that all the Ridgeway MPs were now vice-presidents and commented that most of the activity recorded was the chairman's not his. Adoption was moved by Chris Parnell, seconded by Nigel Forward.
5. Treasurer's Report & Accounts The Treasurer introduced the accounts.

The Receipts and Payments Account for the year ended 31st December 2001 shows that we had an exceptional year in terms of increased income from subscriptions, donations and publicity sales.

Total Receipts were up on the previous year, 2000, by £3660.

Subscriptions were up by £1356, Donations by £1253 and Publicity Sales by £1066.

The subscription income increased by 130% in terms on money, but this does not mean that our membership increased by the same amount. £1120 of the subscription income was from new life memberships, while £1244 was from subscriptions paid annually.

The increase in donations was headed by £500 from the Tanner Trust, a legacy of £250, £100 from an individual donor, and £50 from the Goring and Streatley Amenity Association.

Under Publicity Sales, £1138 was received from Christmas card sales.

Total Expenses increased by £1337. Under General Administration, the item Stationery includes the cost of printing the new letterheads. Publicity Printing includes the new Membership leaflets and the

Christmas cards. The item, Design, under Other Expenses was for the revised logo design.

We thus had/surplus in 2001 of £2423 and an end of year Bank balance of £5827.

The fact that the Friends' income was all but quadrupled in 2001 is due to the vigorous publicity and fund-raising work of our Chairman.

Adoption of the accounts

was moved by Rex Hepburn, seconded by Mary Baines

6. Elections

President & Vice-Presidents The existing President and Vice-presidents were proposed from the chair and re-elected

Chairman Ian Ritchie Proposed Chris Brasher, seconded Jane Ebbutt
Secretary Peter Gould proposed Ian Ritchie, seconded Anna Hanslip
Treasurer Anna Hanslip Proposed Mary Hepburn seconded Nigel Forward

Committee Members Jane Ebbutt was willing to stand again for the committee. It was decided to appoint a nominee from the YHA in place of James MacKenzie, who is to leave England. There were no other candidates

The Chairman thanked Kate Crennell who was retiring as membership secretary

7. Appointment of Auditor Tom Webb Proposed Anna Hanslip, seconded Peter Gould

After the close of formal business, the chairman reviewed the campaign to ban non-essential vehicles. It was announced that the Society had that morning withdrawn its signature from the Ridgeway Code of Respect and hoped other signatories would do the same.

The President revealed "The Secret we share with Beethoven, Tolstoy, Wordsworth and Bevan".

The Meeting ended at 4 o'clock after a performance by the St James Singers

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING 2003

Sunday 23rd March 2pm
Goring Village Hall

1. Apologies
2. Minutes of 2002 AGM
3. Matters Arising
4. Annual Report
5. Treasurer's Report & Accounts
6. Election of
President & Vice-Presidents
Chairman
Secretary
Treasurer
Membership Secretary
Committee Members (5)
7. Appointment of Auditor
8. Any Other Business

Grid Ref: SU 598 807

Please park in the Goring Village Car Park, there is no parking at the Hall.

Goring is well served by public transport, both trains and buses.

Copy for the Spring Issue by 28th March please
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