

FRIENDS OF THE RIDGEWAY
Spring 2003
NEWSLETTER



RITCHIE'S RAMBLINGS

We have enjoyed the most successful period ever in our campaign since I wrote my last Ramblings. I have never felt more positive that our message is getting through, that common sense is being listened to and that action is about to follow. My enthusiasm is based on three main points:

1. Wiltshire County Council and Oxfordshire County Council have joined West Berkshire Council in agreeing to work towards a complete ban on all recreational motor vehicles on The Ridgeway.

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New Website:

www.ridgewayfriends.org.uk

This vindicates our view that the vast majority of local people who love and use The Ridgeway want it to be traffic free.

2. The Minister for Rural Affairs, Alun Michael, has recognised the seriousness of the situation on The Ridgeway and has demanded that the Countryside Agency produce a detailed management plan by the end of July. He wishes to see works commenced, including repairs and Traffic Regulation Orders, by the end of September.
3. Lord Bradshaw introduced an amendment calling for a ban on all non-essential motor vehicles on all National Trails to a Bill going through the Lords. The amendment achieved majority cross-party support in the Lords but was modified in the Commons to just give the Secretary of State the powers to impose such a ban if conditions warrant it. Nonetheless, Tony McNulty

(Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport) said in the debate in the House that "if the Countryside Agency's management plan and the work of the local authorities do not produce results within 12 months, the Government are committed to consider promoting such a ban along the length of The Ridgeway." He went on, "I will say as starkly as I can that the Countryside Agency is on notice for 12 months." He was pressed further by Don Foster, MP for Bath, who asked if "there is a clear commitment to introduce a ban if the Countryside Agency does not get its act together in the 12 month period." Mr McNulty confirmed that he was giving such a commitment.

These three factors are putting considerable pressure on the Countryside Agency, the local authorities and the Ridgeway Management Group to act quickly and decisively, characteristics that are

seemingly alien to their natural behaviour.

We are trying to work with all parties to help them come forward with a practical plan. It is likely that there will be a lot more positive news to report by the time of the next Newsletter. For those of you who have Internet access and wish to keep up with developments as they happen, check out our new

website
www.ridgewayfriends.org.uk

I have managed to get out onto The Ridgeway a few times in the recent spell of dry weather. The usual problems of hard-set ruts are prevalent on much of the route but I really do think that they are worse than ever you may have seen me sitting in a rut in a photograph that accompanied a recent article in



*Man is the Measure of all things
Including ruts*

the Daily Telegraph. That was at Sparsholt and I measured the rut at 2 feet (60cms) deep. At that precise spot a horse rider was thrown from her horse when it lost its footing. Fortunately she was only badly

bruised and not more seriously injured. Let's hope that a ban on vehicles comes in time to prevent a tragedy.

Ian Ritchie

A VOICE FROM THE PAST

Hark to the voice of ancient wisdom reverberating down the decades. To the 1982 Ridgeway Conference, Mr Gresswell from the Countryside Commission said "the voluntary restraint policy, first introduced experimentally in 1980, ought to be given a fair trial. Unfortunately, it had proved difficult to appoint a Ridgeway Officer so that the coming summer would be the first fully monitored period of trial" After twenty years of monitoring, his successors say the same.

*Just the place for a Snark
I've said it thrice
What I tell you three times is true*

OUT OF THE RUT

Sometimes, we do look up from the mud and worry about the wider prospect. Earlier this year, a planning application was made to West Berkshire Council to demolish Roden Farm near Compton and build a very large country mansion on the site of an old farmhouse and stables.

We shared the concern of the CPRE and the Ramblers that such a large new building

would be out of place on the Downs and might set a precedent for other old farm buildings. It would alter the wild, remote, character of this area to an unacceptable degree and lead to more traffic on the access Bridleway or demands for a new tarmac road.

So these organisations invited all concerned persons to meet nearby on the Ridgeway on Saturday 21st June 2003, during

CPRE's 'Landscape Celebration' week. To admire the landscape, discuss the problem, express their concern

"We were lucky to have a superb day, not too hot or windy, and had numerous discussions with a steady stream of walkers and

Almost everyone saw the open, arable landscape as the most

THE SECRET HISTORY OF THE BICYCLE

Admirers of Flann O'Brien will recall that in *The Third Policeman* bicycles become people by a kind of osmosis. And of course *vice versa*. Flann O'Brien was grossly oversimplifying the nature of the beast. Bicycles are not merely bicycles it is true, but neither are they merely human.

So long as my personal liberty is not at risk, so long as my own property is not at stake, above all, so long as I do not have to pay the learned friends, I find the law fascinating. It is like one of those intricate clocks where the moon and stars revolve and knights on horseback caper about with

valued feature and thought the proposed mansion would-be detrimental. Other most valued assets in the area were flower-rich meadows and the footpath network."

The application was withdrawn in June - though they do have a hardy perennial habit.

jerky regularity. Just as these clocks never tell you the correct time, so the law never truly configures reality yet it has a surreal, formal charm nowhere else to be found.

Take the nature of the bicycle. Everyone who knows the elements of footpath law is well aware that for certain purposes, by right of statute (Countryside Act 1968) a bicycle is a horse allowed to use bridleways. Strangely, the llama is probably not a horse, which must be a horse pony, ass bicycle or mule, and may not do so, though eventually the logic that makes a motorcar a horse and trap may be brought to bear

creatively on the llama's predicament.

This commonplace recital is only the background to a new legalistic saltation. When the bike is not human by osmosis or equine by statute, it is, by common law, a carriage. Just remember that our judges could tell wheels from legs but were baffled by mechanical details: the consequence perhaps of a classical education.

The law is definite that a bicycle is a carriage and that it is not mechanically propelled. From this it follows that cycling on a footpath is no crime, only a trespass. Persistence in crime can never create a right; persistence in trespass can. Therefore, cycling on a path can establish carriage rights. So the path is classifiable as a BOAT. Motorised vehicles may then use it. (Cycling on bridleways proves nothing because a bike is tantamount to a pony ass or mule not a llama)

Don't imagine that I'm making this up. The metamorphosis of the bicycle at once into a four-wheel drive and a stalking horse is the subject of an Advice Note to planning inspectors. The Advice Note having no legal force and not being an authoritative interpretation of the law reaches the admirably balanced view that there are respectable arguments on both sides. DEFRA, however, thinks the counter argument that the law should not countenance the creation of rights by long use where the rights would authorise use of a kind prohibited by statute might well find favour with the courts.

So perhaps the bicycle is genetically incapable of being a weasel. :

Kiss my lawyer!
I'm a bicycle!



THE TRUE STORY OF OUR PACK HORSE

BY THOMAS R. L. BLACK, B.E.M.

An adventure eighty years ago continued

The horse needed water, fortunately there was a stream and before bed in the tent, I got him to this little stream. It was part of the Cuttle brook.

A stray cow woke us up by putting her head in to the tent and having a good look at us.

Hunger was a problem, and we went to a nearby pub and they were delighted to cook bacon and eggs for us plus they gave us good tea. The old lady ruffled Teedie's hair and gave him a hug. I was treated as being above that sort of age I think we only had three or four pounds in money.

We went on that wonderful grass road made over time and use, a beautiful place to be. Our pack horse by the second day did not have to be led. If we got too far ahead we sat down in the grass and waited for him. gave him a rest and then went on our way.

We made good progress on the second day; we were getting nearer to the River Thames.

Past a perfect circle of old trees. Perhaps an ancient burial ground. On our way, all three of us, the pack horse, brother Stephen Black and I. had often seen it now we were near it, so we left the grass road and took a closer look. Our horse had that expression on his face that told in many words that it was just part of the adventure, and he came.

We were getting accustomed to the direction; the road at times disappeared, although it was once very important.

Once on this expedition, we camped and I could not sleep well. I looked at the map and found where we were. Printed on the map was "Hangman's Corner".

At a horse ferry, upstream from Marlow, our pack horse refused to get aboard. It almost lectured us that horses are land animals. We had lump sugar in our food that did not move him. It was rather like trying to tempt a rather wicked four or five years

younger, to take a rather nasty medicine by saying you can have a nice bit of Cadbury chocolate if you hold your nose and just take it. The little boy or girl says, "Make it two bits and I will take it".

A man driving a tractor stopped the engine, climbed over the hedge, turned the pack horse round, and backed it on to the ferry, I learned a lot from this event. Not only how to get a pig headed horse to get on a boat to cross the River Thames, (These ferries need explaining. There is a chain fixed to each side of the river. The chain goes over to a cog wheel on the boat. You turn a handle on the boat and your effort moves the boat. Turn the handle one way and you cross. Turn the handle the other way and you return.)

The pack horse had a good drink of Thames water and we found a nice cafe, well, hardly that, but a shop where we could have a meal. They gave us Quaker Oats for the horse.

The camping was fun. The tent was up and we drank the lemonade. Tethered and

unloaded, the horse was now being freed from the weight. Dawn woke us up. The birds were singing. A pigeon cleaned up some of the fallen oats, and we were on our way looking for another track of the Icknield Way going more or less southwest.

At lunch time the three of us had a good rest, and come night we found a wonderful cast iron tank with a float that turned the water on and off. It had a notice on it that read, "horse trough". We went into the wood, pitched the tent. Took care that the horse was well tied up. We also ate some of our emergency food from a small bag, we shared an orange. I was a bit uncertain about where we were. We lit a fire, a small fire, and used the water holder, tipped it into a little saucepan, added some tea and sugar, a lot of tinned milk. This was wonderful. As explorers we were doing well. There were no friendly natives, we felt very much on our own. A good test if you are a real explorer.

At dawn, we packed up and went our way. The pack horse



*Vision of a Green Lane
Unfortunately it's Offa's Dyke, not the Ridgeway*

was becoming a very good carrier. There was a bridle path nearby and we took this after a rather heated debate. We walked and walked, the horse stopped often to take a bite of something he fancied to eat, and we walked. He stopped suddenly by a cabbage field, leaned over the wire and took quite a time eating a stolen cabbage. He then saw we were

quite a way ahead, trotted up rather fast, stopped and tried to get into a garden for his dinner.

In a little village, after we had crossed the river, the Icknield Way became rather hard to find, because the original road seemed to have disappeared. There were places here one could walk over grassland that belonged to a farmer; we still continued in the right direction.

Daylight and our pack horse seemed to have enough. We had to find water for him and tie him to some place where the rope was long enough that he could do a bit of eating. We gave him his ration of Quaker Oats. He rubbed his nice old nose against my shoulder. A real friendly action on his part.

We always removed his pack or lead. We were hungry. We woke up early, made our way to a little village. Pack horse also. It had become "Where you goeth, there I go". The being led was a thing of the past.

There was a restaurant and a good fence to tie up the horse. We went in and the lady took a long look at us. "Gosh, you two look half starved." So we were. That breakfast will always be remembered.

We were starting to run out of money. Camping cost no money, but eating does. Filling our tummies was a great problem for all three of us, worse for my brother and me because we could not graze our way on the taste of grass and add the taste of tree leaves like

our pack horse. We agreed on two more days of exploring and we would set off for home. Yet it was still great fun. We took off our clothes when we found a stream and washed in the clean water. This was in an odd way a good thing. The pack horse had a long drink and feasted on some grass and weeds.

A kind old lady asked us about what we were doing and we told her. She said "Oh my! At your age!" Rather annoying.

She said that she would make some ham sandwiches and two hard boiled eggs. She was wonderful. All her children were married and she always enjoyed children.

"They are more exciting to be with. They, like you two, do something different every day."

The trip back was far less of an effort because we were now well trained for it. Going northeast was very different; we were on roads where we might catch a glimpse of Grims Ditch.

I return to the trip back that also was fun. In my mind's eye, I seemed to know when and where Wendover was and my Mother and Father plus my two sisters Jill and Biddy. A mattress on my bed got more important. When you are very young life is very different. "Master Tam! Come in out of the rain you will catch your death." On the trip I had all this behind me. I felt older every day.



How beautiful the country gets when you see it without big towns and tarred roads. The wonder of dawn outside the tent. Dawn is a joy and still is.

The trip back got hard because we covered more ground each day. We thought of home sweet home, and being certain about food, but we were both happy and content. Once more we crossed the river Thames and were getting nearer home. The ferry worked well. The pack

horse seemed to have been in the Royal Navy.

On the ferry or off the ferry, there was the same rain. We were otherwise doing well. We had plenty of walking exercise. We were getting stronger and more accustomed to being rather wet yet sleeping well. It was funny because being two persons and one horse, we were very considerate about each

other. The further we went, the pack horse seemed to like us more and more, or was it the Quaker Oats? Every time we were about to start, I had a good look at the horse's four shoes. They stood up to it well. The pack horse seemed to like this attention and would lift each hoof without much fuss. It was fun for explorers to know that we would soon be back to a civilized life with a hot and cold tap at our request. We did in fact wash more often on the way back. Then one day we were getting quite near home and went through the wood near Chequers, the home of the Prime Minister. It was getting dark and started to rain. We found a house on the Chequers Estate. It was abandoned and unlocked. We three stopped our long walk of that day and Teedie and I went into the abandoned house. The horse

took shelter in a rough barn, and all slept well.

So we started for the last four miles and to celebrate, the morning sun showed its friendly face. The untied horse joined us and we were on our way. A short walk up and over Coombe Hill, Wendover looked wonderful. You could see the clock tower down below.

We arrived home at about nine o'clock, late for breakfast. Packed into the bed and slept with a mattress and clean sheets.

We, the adventurers had a good sleep. The pack horse without a load walked down to the brook at the bottom of the garden and had a good drink at the stream, came back into its stall, ate a lot of oats, plus hay and stayed there most of the day.

**Copy for the Autumn Newsletter by
28th September please**

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