

FRIENDS OF THE RIDGEWAY

 Winter 2004
NEWSLETTER

RITCHIE'S RAMBLINGS

Our first vehicle ban! You should already have received a letter telling you the good news about the motor vehicle ban on the Smeathe's Ridge section of the Trail in Wiltshire. A wonderful start to the New Year and a belated delivery on a resolution I made when I was elected Chairman of The Friends.

At the AGM in March 2001, when I was appointed, I said that I hoped we would achieve our first ban within two years. It has taken three, but nonetheless I am delighted.

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Website: www.ridgewayfriends.org.uk

What about my resolutions for this year? Well, so far I am managing to achieve one of them - to get out onto The Ridgeway at least once every week. In particular I have visited Bury Down and the sections around the Uffington White Horse. The state of the Trail makes me even more determined to press forward with our campaign. The track is deteriorating rapidly and some of the sections that were repaired by Oxfordshire County Council are almost back to the condition they were in a year ago. The section just east of the A34 is appalling. Did any of you see it featured in a recent BBC Breakfast Time programme?

Incidentally, if you go to Bury Down any Sunday you are almost certainly going to see numerous motorbikes being off-loaded from trailers and Transit vans and then ridden out on The Ridgeway. Almost all the bikes are without number plates and (presumably) tax and insurance. We are working with Thames Valley Police to try to ensure that the riders are firstly warned and subsequently prosecuted if they persist.

Another New Year resolution is to get fitter. This is probably shared with many of you but I have a very good reason to take it seriously. I have entered for the Ridgeway Walk, a mere 40 miles along the western Ridgeway, all to be completed within a day! Sheer madness! Anyway, too late to withdraw now that I have told you all. If any of you are equally insane why don't you investigate the details of the walk - they appear elsewhere in this Newsletter. Later in the year I am also going to attempt to walk the 84 miles of Hadrian's Wall. This will be done over a week, to raise money for a charity that I am involved in. I am looking forward to trying this new National Trail and to making comparisons to The Ridgeway. From what I have seen so far, the Countryside Agency is making a much better job of promoting Hadrian's Wall than it does The Ridgeway.

Enough of this rambling - on with the boots and off to The Ridgeway!

Ian Ritchie

LATE GOOD NEWS

Recognising that progress to solving the problems on The Ridgeway was slow, the Minister for Rural Affairs, Alun Michael, called and chaired a meeting of all interested parties at Westminster on the 28th January. Present were representatives of the Countryside Agency and Wiltshire, Oxfordshire, Swindon Borough and West Berkshire councils. The Friends were well represented by Lord Bradshaw (President), Ian Ritchie (Chairman), the MPs Robert Jackson, David Rendel, David Liddington and Julia Drown (Vice Presidents) and Lord Avebury – despite the rival attractions of the Hutton report. All parties seemingly agreed on the aim of ridding The Ridgeway of recreational motor vehicles. There was a difference in view in how this should be achieved, with Alun Michael urging local authorities to apply TROs in their areas and the local authorities urging the Minister to apply one blanket TRO to the whole Trail. We favour the one blanket TRO approach and argued for this. The advice of the Chief Constables of the Wiltshire and Thames Valley Police Forces is being sought on the enforcement of bans. It is likely that there will now be some work 'behind the scenes' between representatives of DEFRA, the Countryside Agency and the local authorities to determine the best way forward. It is very heartening that the Minister is investing so much of his personal time on our cause, that all parties appear agreed about the long term aim of a motor vehicle free Ridgeway.

PARISH COUNCIL WELCOMES PEWSEY LINK

Pewsey Parish Council believes that the possibility of linking the village to the Ridgeway set out in a Wiltshire County Council document, has “exciting ramifications” for their community, bringing trade for pubs, tea rooms and other businesses. Because Pewsey has a railway station, this would also relieve pressure on car parks at Avebury.

Yes, we have been saying this for years, but it is good to find common sense receiving official recognition. Perhaps even the National Trails Office will pay attention.

THE GOVERNMENT CONSULTS PLEASE RESPOND

You have until 19th March to let the Minister know that you personally support the proposals in the Consultation Document on the *Use of mechanically propelled vehicles on Rights of Way*. As you think the Government has got it right, it is tempting to do nothing, but the recreational motoring lobby is doubtless exerting itself so the politicians need encouragement. This opportunity will not occur again.

MOTOR VEHICLES ON THE RIDGEWAY AND OTHER DOWNLAND TRACKS

If you are caused alarm, distress or annoyance by motor vehicles (4x4s, trail bikes or quad bikes), which may have been driving without consideration for other legitimate users on foot, on horseback or on pedal cycles, and which may have been damaging the surface of the track, or driving in an aggressive and threatening manner, please report them to:

Pc Pete Hale
Thames Valley Police
Colwell Drive
ABINGDON
Oxon OX12 1AU

Tel: 01235 556820

Mobile: 07970 145402

E-mail: pete.hale@thamesvalley.pnn.police.uk

Please give Pc Hale as many details of the incident as possible, i.e. time, date, location, direction of travel, details of the vehicle(s) (make, colour, registration number, or if the vehicle(s) had no number plate).

If trail bikes have no number plates, but you see them being loaded or unloaded onto or from another vehicle or a trailer behind it, please give Pc Hale the details of the carrying or towing vehicle.

Please ask Pc Hale to take action under Section 59 *Police Reform Act 2002*.

THE STORY OF A LOST VILLAGE

A fascinating chapter of English rural history lies just off The Ridgeway, near Aldbourne in Wiltshire. Hidden in thick undergrowth and shielded by now mature trees is the deserted village of Snap.

Like many rural settlements, its early history is unclear. There is evidence of habitation in the immediate area going back to Romano-British times and there is a Roman road within two miles of the site. The earliest recorded reference to the village is as Snape in the 13th century and it is variously referred to as Snape, Snappe and Snapp before settling as Snap by the late 19th century.

Snap was always small. The 1377 Poll Tax returns show 19 people paying at Snape, which suggests a population of about 25 adults. It never grew much more than this over its history, although in 1812 there was a school for 16 children in the village. The school moved to Woodsend in 1855. The village never appears to have boasted a pub nor church nor chapel.

Like many small communities, Snap had a largely uneventful history. It survived the Black Death unscathed and the only apparent interruption to its peaceful life was a major battle of the Civil War close by in 1643.

Agriculture dominated village life. In addition to the more conventional forms, rabbits were an important part of the local economy. The nearby Aldbourne Warren was celebrated as producing 'the best, sweetest and fattest rabbits in England' and Henry IV had Aldbourne rabbits sent to London for his table. It was estimated that in 1720 there were 24,000 rabbits in the farmed warrens of the area!

The Enclosures of the 18th century consigned most of the men of the village to lives as farm labourers, existing on very low wages. The agrarian riots in 1830 in Wiltshire were put down ruthlessly and the ring leaders sentenced to transportation. The repeal of the Corn Laws

in 1846 opened up the way for foreign imports. The first grain was imported from the USA in 1875 and four years later USA imports exceeded the home production. The years 1871 to 1880 were unusually wet and the harvests poor. All over the country, farms were being abandoned and many were bought up by townspeople as the industrial economy accelerated. The two substantial farms at Snap were untenanted by 1890 and the population of Snap declined sharply as families moved away to try their luck in the burgeoning towns.

The final chapter of Snap's life commenced when Henry Wilson, a butcher and entrepreneur from Ramsbury, bought the two major farms in the village in 1905. The farms were used to keep his substantial sheep flocks and as a base for his sheep dealing. Deprived of the work that farms had offered when they were arable, the villagers departed. Soon only four elderly people were left, reducing to two by 1909 and finally the one remaining villager, Rachel Fisher, was persuaded to move to Aldbourne. By 1914 Snap was deserted.

Its dereliction was hastened by being used for military training for the Great War and many of the cottages were plundered for building materials. Today hardly anything is immediately visible to the casual observer but these words from 'Snap' by Kenneth Watts provide a suitable epitaph to a lost village.

"The site of Snap is, today, a moving place full of that peculiar melancholy which is often evoked by places that have been inhabited for centuries past but which are now deserted. The sites of the cottages, their gardens, and to a lesser extent the farmyard, are all covered by trees and undergrowth including a number of garden shrubs that have survived almost a century of neglect."

The author has relied heavily on the following sources:

Richard Muir *The Lost Villages of Britain* and (especially) Kenneth Watts *Snap - the history, depopulation and destruction of a Wiltshire village*

THE RIDGEWAY WALK

In 1962, Reading Local Group of the Youth Hostel Association (YHA) organised a challenging walk for other members of the YHA – a walk along the entire Ridgeway west of Streatley to be completed at one go!

The group became involved in this activity almost by accident when another YHA group started to organise the walk but then backed out because they felt they didn't have enough resources to marshal the event. Having organised it once, Reading group decided to continue it as an annual walk and it has become a popular fixture with many walkers returning year after year.

The original route was the Ridgeway as it appeared on the map. Later, they revised the route to avoid some road walking and to ensure that the length of the walk was 40 miles. This was before the inauguration of the Ridgeway National Trail.

In the first five years, entrants had the option of walking in either direction between Marlborough and Streatley youth hostels. This involved a heavy commitment for marshals, most of whom camped out at their checkpoints the night before the walk. Camping out on the Ridgeway, even in spring, can be very cold and one marshal recalls being kept awake by a gale and the fear that his tent would be blown away.

With the closure of Marlborough hostel in 1966, the walk became a one way event (west to east) with Streatley hostel as the base.

There is no time limit to complete the walk as the group felt that completing the walk itself was enough of an achievement. But it has meant there were many instances of the organisers having to wait up into the small hours of the following morning for the last of the walkers to come in. On the other hand, some 'walkers' were very fast. In 1965, Alan Blatchford, who inaugurated the Tanners Marathon in Surrey and went on to found the Long Distance Walkers Association, ran the 40 miles in 6 hours 22 minutes. Not satisfied with that, he ran back 10 miles along the course to meet his wife who was proceeding 'at a more normal rate. Alan completed about 60 miles in 12 hours.

At the other end of the scale, two ladies who entered the event in 2003 thinking it was a two day event, gamely went on to complete the walk in just over 14 hours.

Commenting in 1979, the then organiser, Norman Griffin, said that the first few years were a bit of a shambles with problems such as a soup urn being left in the wrong place and marshals getting lost. But, as time went by, all these teething troubles were sorted out. Today, there are nine checkpoints, most of which provide light snacks, ambulance personnel on hand to deal with blisters and anything more serious which might happen and radio communication between checkpoints to track the progress of the walkers. All this is designed to give every entrant the best chance to complete the walk.

For those who prefer a shorter distance, a 20 mile walk is held on the same day as the 40 mile walk over the second half of the 40 mile course. For trail runners, who like a race, a 40 mile run is also held. Next year's walks and run are on Saturday, 8 May.

For more details, contact Alan Smith on 020 8301 3829
(Email jungledrums@waitrose.com (40 mile walk)
Ron Cutler on 01235 850578 (20 mile walk)
Mike Sandford on 01235 532207 (40 mile run).

Alan Smith

CORRECTION

A geologist spotted a mistake in the article about the Marsham/Frilford excavation in the last Newsletter

"The bedrock struck at two metres could not have been Chalk, which lies well to the South and dips South, so even the base of the Chalk would be overhead were it present! It is almost certainly the top of the Corallian Limestone, another aquifer which outcrops just to the North and dips South to underlie the clays and alluvium of the Vale of the White Horse. It would be saturated with water in that location down-dip, and could well have given rise to springs under a low artesian pressure were the clay covering of two metres removed or penetrated in some way."

FORTHCOMING EVENTS

AGM	Sunday 21st March Goring Village Hall 2pm
Pre AGM Walk	Goring Car Park 10.30
Snap	Tuesday 30th March 10.15 Aldbourne 10k walk or Woodsend for a very short walk to the deserted village. Further details: 01672 520090
Ridgeway walk	Saturday, 8 May (Details above)
Excavations at Frilford	Tuesday 27th July (Details in the next Newsletter)

NEVER MIND THE MINUTES ENJOY THE HOURS

Besides the morning stroll to the Ridgeway, and an address by our new President, Lord Bradshaw, the diversions of Goring will include

“For you, for me, for evermore” A 20 minute presentation by **James Mitchell** of anecdotes, interesting information and live performances of songs pertaining to the Musicals of the last 60 years: from Gershwin to Andrew Lloyd Webber

Summer Light An exhibition of Cornish Paintings by **Fiona Frank** The paintings present a series of images of the West Penwith area since the 1980s, celebrating natural beauty; the intensity of colour in the local light; the wildness of the elements; the changeability of weather and skies.

Woodlands and gardens, moorland and coastline, streams, meadows, rivers all inspire Fiona's vivid, vital work. To capture the spirit of place she paints *en plein air*, working against time to catch combinations of light and shadow and to beat the weather: (Some of her favourite works have resulted from the special light in between showers.)

Fiona prefers to let her pictures speak for themselves. Resisting categorisation and avoiding association with any particular 'school', she stays free from such fetters and takes whatever route the subject suggests. If forced to describe her work, she says the terms 'impressionist / expressionist' and 'colourist' could apply.

ANNUAL REPORT 2003

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

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

The Society has three main aims and the year's activities are classified accordingly

1 To ensure the conservation of the Ridgeway long distance path and its preservation as a grassy track for walkers and where appropriate, especially west of the Thames, for horse-riders and pedal cyclists; as a natural habitat for flora and fauna; and as a feature of outstanding historic and scenic importance: promoting measures particular to the Ridgeway and measures of more general application as appropriate

This year has seen more real progress towards our vision of a motor vehicle free Ridgeway. Your society has represented its views vigorously to local and national government and has achieved some notable successes.

Oxfordshire County Council, Wiltshire County Council and West Berkshire Council have all confirmed their opposition to non-essential motor vehicles on their sections of the Trail. Through some clever work in the House of Lords by our new President, Lord Bradshaw, the government was forced to commit to taking action on The Ridgeway if the local councils do not come up with a solution within 12 months (from July 2003).

As ever, the Countryside Agency, as custodian of the Trail, has been dragging its heels but belatedly it has published plans to tackle the issues. The plans include a ban on motor vehicles during times when the Trail is vulnerable to damage, for example in wet weather when the ground is soft. The plans are an attempt to form a consensus between all the various Ridgeway user groups. We have given the proposals a cautious welcome but are sceptical of the motoring organisations being able to deliver their part of the bargain.

The government has recently published its proposals to tackle the issue of motor vehicles on rights of way in the country generally. We are pleased to have had a strong influence in bringing this debate into the public arena and Alun Michael, the Minister concerned, specifically mentioned The Ridgeway in the launch of the consultation paper.

We are very optimistic that 2004 will bring some real breakthroughs in our campaign to restore The Ridgeway to the peaceful path it once was, for the enjoyment of walkers, cyclists and horse riders and to the benefit of the local wildlife and the historic sites along the route.

The Chairman represented the friends at the annual Ridgeway Forum with the Secretary as Observer.

2 To encourage public interest in the history, natural history and geography of the Ridgeway and its associated antiquities

Lord Avebury's addressed the AGM on the historical and political significance of The Ridgeway, and the Chairman gave a talk to a local branch of U3A. Four public walks on or near The Trail were organised as well as a visit to the archaeological excavations at Marcham/Frilford. The Committee decided that rather than duplicate the work of the many established walking groups, it would in future concentrate on "ambulant lectures". The chairman and committee would like to thank the organisers of walks, and excavations and all other entertainments over the past year.

Four issues of the Newsletter appeared with articles on a variety of topics from archaeology to an early 20th Century packhorse trip in the Ridgeway country, cress beds and the quirks of highway law.

Peter Gould and Janet Hierons, with the guidance of Brian Twigger, undertook the construction of a new website incorporating revised material from the Society's *Essential Ridgeway* document and Kate Crennell's copious bibliography. Like any website, this is not and never will be complete. Further material on the geology, antiquities, legends, flora, fauna and modern history of the Ridgeway Corridor will be gratefully added as it is made available. We thank everyone who has already provided additional material, hints or corrections.

3 To encourage high standards of planning, architecture and landscape architecture in the neighbourhood of the Ridgeway)

During the year, your society represented lovers of The Ridgeway and its environs on a number of planning applications. In particular

- a planning application for an unsightly telecommunications mast at Warren Farm was refused, but is subject to appeal.
- a planning application for six big wind turbines in the Vale of the White Horse was turned down, but an earlier application for smaller units is still extant.
- the plan to demolish Roden Farm and to build a big dwelling has been withdrawn but may yet be resurrected in a different form
- a plan to build a two storey industrial unit in Wantage, in view from The Ridgeway, has been turned down but is being appealed

MEMBERSHIP			
	2002	Change	2003
Individual	170	-1	169
Family	67	+10	77
Life	147	+13	160
Associations	23	-4	19
TOTAL	407	+18	425

The actual number of new members, was 52 (Individual 21, Family 18, Life 12, Associations 1). In these figures, 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.

ACCOUNTS

Receipts and payments for the year ended 31st December 2003

	2003	2002
	£	£
RECEIPTS		
Subscriptions	2450	3221
Donations	1756	1568
Publicity Sales incl Christmas Cards	1685	980
Bank Interest	55	37
	<u>5946</u>	<u>5806</u>
 PAYMENTS		
Newsletter	1275	969
Postage & Telephone	126	242
Stationery	458	1169
Printing & Copying	216	1422
Christmas Cards	853	912
Affiliation Fees	63	62
AGM	168	97
PR Consultant	-	1644
Website	1101	-
Legal Advice	848	-
Sundry Expenses	186	113
	<u>5294</u>	<u>6630</u>
Surplus (Deficit) for the Year	652	(824)
Balances Brought Forward	5003	5827
	<u>5655</u>	<u>5003</u>
 Represented by		
Lloyds TSB Current Account	347	242
Lloyds TSB Instant Access Account	5308	4761
	<u>5655</u>	<u>5003</u>

A Hanslip (Hon Treasurer)

I have audited the above Accounts which are in accordance with the books and vouchers presented to me

T C L Webb, FCIS FAIA (Hon Auditor)

NEW CONSTITUTION

Your Executive Committee is investigating the possibility of achieving registered charitable status for our society. We believe that this would significantly increase our credibility when representing the case for preserving, protecting and promoting The Ridgeway to local and national government and others. We think it will help our efforts to enlist more members and it will have a positive effect on our finances. All donations would benefit from a tax rebate from the government through the Gift Aid scheme and there are a number of charitable trusts that may be prepared to grant us funds but only on condition that we are a registered charity. To obtain registered charity status we would need to alter constitution. Rather than make piecemeal changes, we propose that the society adopt a new constitution conforming to a Charity Commission model. The significant difference is that the present aims will be replaced by one "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 facilities in the interests of social welfare for the public benefit"

2003 AGM Goring Village Hall Sunday 23rd March

Attendance 58

The Chairman opened the meeting and preceded the business with a tribute to Chris Brasher, the President of the Society, who had recently died.

1. **Apologies:** Pat Crabb, Kate Ashwell. Julia Drown MP, Sir Chris Bonington, Sir Patrick Cormack MP, David Liddington MP, David Rendel MP, Andrew Albourne, Boris Johnson MP, Janet Priestman, Patrick Oakley, Lady Treitel, Dr Nick Maurice, Janet Smart, Clive Bostle, Rex & Mary Hepburn, Diana Keast, Kay Watts, Sheila Thompson, Jo Bird. No representative of the National Trails Office could attend.

2. The **minutes** of the 2002 AGM were accepted as accurate

3. There were no **matters arising**.

4. The Secretary formally introduced the **Annual Report**. Its adoption was seconded by Nigel Forward

5. The Treasurer introduced the **accounts**. Their adoption was seconded by Mary Wheatley

Income and expenditure both increased in 2002. Under **Receipts**, subscriptions were up by £857 on 2001, and donations, which included a very generous donation of £1,000 from the Tanner Trust, by £249. Publicity sales were down by £254, but overall, total revenue rose by £886.

The increased expenditure last year reflected the ongoing campaigning activities of the Chairman and committee. The Newsletter is now distributed quarterly. There was a reprint of the 'Save the Ridgeway' leaflet, but the rise in Postage, Stationery and Printing was largely accounted for by the increased number of News Releases and communications to members. Kites were purchased as promotional give-away at rallies. The services of a PR Consultant were employed for work with the Media.

Total Expenses were thus up on 2001 by £4,133, resulting in a deficit of £824 in 2002. However, the Bank balance is healthy at £5,000, and will enable us to continue our vigorous campaigning.

6. Elections

As a consequence of Chris Brasher's very recent death, no one was nominated as President. The Vice-presidents were proposed by Barbara Owen, seconded by Margaret Ibbott and re-elected unanimously *en bloc*.

Chairman: Ian Ritchie (Proposed Barry Hitchcox, seconded Jack Ibbott)

Secretary: Peter Gould (Proposed Anna Hanslip, seconded Jane Ebbutt)

Treasurer: Anna Hanslip (Proposed Peter Gould seconded Ian Ritchie)

Membership Secretary: Janet Hierons (Proposed Nigel Forward, seconded Anna Hanslip)

Committee Member: Jane Ebbutt was willing to stand again for the committee. (Proposed Ian Ritchie, seconded Peter Gould)

7. **Appointment of Auditor:** Tom Webb was proposed by Barry Hitchcox, seconded by Margaret Ibbott

8. There was no **Other Business**

After the close of formal business, the chairman gave a presentation on the progress and purpose of the Society's campaigns.

Lord Avebury spoke on the historical and political context of the Ridgeway. The Meeting ended at 4 o'clock after a performance by Anything Goes.

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING 2004

Sunday 21st March 2pm
Goring Village Hall

1. Apologies
2. Minutes of 2003 AGM
3. Matters Arising
4. Annual Report
5. Treasurer's Report & Accounts
6. Adoption of new Constitution
7. Election of
President & Vice-Presidents
Chairman
Secretary
Treasurer
Membership Secretary
Committee Members (5)
8. Appointment of Auditor
9. Any Other Business

Address by Lord Bradshaw

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 Newsletter by
30th March please

18, Hampton Park, Bristol BS6 6LH

Ridgewayfriends@aol.com

Items for the website are gladly received at any time