

FRIENDS OF THE RIDGEWAY
Autumn 2005

NEWSLETTER

RITCHIE'S RAMBLINGS

Re-reading this piece after I had written it made me realise that, inadvertently, I had stumbled on a theme – contrasts.

Contrast one – The Lakes and The Ridgeway. I have recently returned from a few days in The Lakes with a group of old friends. Some of the friendships go back to school days, which is a long time ago for me. We used to sing a song 'Forty years on' when at school – well, that's now!

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Website: www.ridgewayfriends.org.uk

Anyway, we had a great time together, although other commitments meant that I was only able to join them for two days' walking. The days were good, though – one tough climb up Helvellyn, scrambling up Striding Edge and down Swirral Edge, and the other an excellent walk from Ambleside over Wansfell to Troutbeck (Cumberland sausage sandwich and good beer in the pub for lunch) then back to Windermere over Orrest Head. Kind weather, splendid views, entertaining company, tough climbs and hard rock underfoot. What a contrast to my last visit to The Ridgeway – lousy weather, soft ground underfoot, gentle climbs and miserable company (just me!). The common factor was the splendour of the very different views on both outings. Forty years on and a lot of walking all round the UK has made me realise that it is the wonderful contrasts in our scenery that I love. Arguing with your friends as to which is best is enjoyable but ultimately pretty futile. Vive la difference!

Contrast two – Equipment. Over a pint or three of beer in the evenings in The Lakes, my friends and I started reminiscing about the equipment we had used when we first started serious hill walking. I remember my first waterproof, a bright red cape. It was certainly waterproof; indeed it was totally waterproof. The problem was that it neither let rain in from the outside nor sweat out from the inside. After a couple of miles wearing it on a climb, I would be as wet as if I had stood in a tropical thunderstorm. And my first boots! I swear that they weighed more than three modern pairs. Despite repeated applications of Dubbin, they resolutely remained stiff and unyielding. Equipment has come along way in forty years, although for a simple soul like me it is all getting very confusing. Do I, for example, want a lightweight all weather outer waterproof jacket, or a heavyweight four seasons version, or even a triple layer trekking garment? It was easier when it was a case of a red or yellow cape!

Contrast three – Photographs. I have had two requests for contrasting photographs of The Ridgeway recently. To support an article being written by Chris Hall, one of our Executive Committee

members, I was asked for some shots showing the problems created by motor vehicles on the Trail. At the same time our Membership Secretary, Janet Hierons, asked if I had any photographs showing the beauty and variety of The Ridgeway for a revision of our brochure that she is preparing. Can you guess which request I found easier to fulfil? Yes, I have a huge selection of photographs of the Trail chewed up by motor vehicles. On the other hand I struggled to find many showing the beauty of the route. My hope is that, long before another forty years passes, the photographs of the vehicle damage become records for the archives and that future generations of young walkers will experience the joys of a quiet countryside, free from recreational off-road motor vehicles, that will start them on a lifetime's pleasure just as I did forty years ago.

THE NERC BILL

In the last Newsletter I explained that the Natural Environment and Rural Communities (NERC) Bill could have implications for The Ridgeway. The Bill has received its third reading in the Commons and, by the time you read this, will have had its second reading in the Lords. Progress so far is highly promising.

I am chairing a new national alliance of like-minded bodies, The Green Lane Protection Group (GLPG), to press the Government to bring in the Rights of Way provisions in the Bill without concessions to the off-road motoring lobby. Other organisations in the GLPG include the Campaign for the Protection of Rural England, Council for National Parks, Country Landowners Association, CTC – the national cyclists' organisation, Friends of The Lake District and The Ramblers.

In the Commons, MP after MP stood up to bemoan the fate of the ancient green lanes of England and Wales, under siege from the growing number of off-road motor vehicles turning them into noisy, unsafe, muddy and rutted battlefields. As a result, the Minister has changed his position on the need to commence the legislation as

quickly as possible. He has also introduced greater safeguards for byways in National Parks and has accepted our point that some careful redrafting of the Bill will overcome potential Human Rights issues.

There remains one last but big hurdle to cross. Since the Bill was first mooted, the off-road lobby has deluged local highway authorities with byway claims, in the hope that these will be heard under the old 'horse and cart' rules and not the new NERC Bill provisions. There are currently well over 2000 such claims in the pipeline. We are arguing, with Leading Counsel's opinion to support us, that all such claims should be heard under the new rules. Should we win the argument, then almost all of the outstanding claims would fail and there will be no extension to the current routes open to motor vehicles. Obviously this is very important in stopping the inexorable incursion of off-roaders into the countryside and is a valuable prize in itself. But why is it important for The Ridgeway?

Many stretches of The Ridgeway (mostly in West Berkshire and Oxfordshire) are presently classified as Roads Used as Public Paths – RUPPs. If the NERC Bill is enacted and if outstanding claims are considered under the new provisions, then all these sections of the Trail will become Restricted Byways and will carry no motor vehicle rights. We stand on the threshold of achieving one of our major objectives – but only if NERC is commenced quickly and without exemption for outstanding claims. Fingers crossed!!

Ian Ritchie



Does this even need a caption?

MONITORING RIDGEWAY TROs

Enclosed with this Newsletter you should find a letter from the National Trails Officer, asking for help in monitoring the effectiveness of the Traffic Regulation Orders on The Ridgeway. She hopes that a number of The Friends of The Ridgeway will be able to help. If you are prepared to do so, please complete the enclosed form and send it to the National Trails Office at the address on the letter (and not to us!).

WENDOVER DIVERSION

A temporary closure order is being sought to close FP23 known as Heron Path in Wendover. The right of way will be interrupted for approx 50m from where it meets Church Lane from 9 January 2006 for approximately 6-8 weeks in order that heavy machinery may have access to the adjacent pond for restoration work. Diversion signs will be put in place to guide pedestrians up Church Lane, along South Street and back down Chapel Lane.

UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD EXCAVATIONS AT MARCHAN/FRILFORD 2005



Eleven members were welcomed by Dr Gary Lock, Course Director, to the University of Oxford excavations at Marcham/Frilford on 26th July. He said it had been a fantastic season, although the wet weather had been a problem.

Gilbert Oteyo then conducted the group around the site starting with excavations of the entrance to the temenos, the sacred area around the temple. It has proved to be large and complex with a cobbled courtyard thought to have contained monuments and a series of rooms. Two sets of buildings have been exposed abutting the temenos walls. A series of furnaces indicate these were

workshops perhaps for the manufacture of copper alloy implements. A number of coins and implements have been found there.

To the east, a large cobbled area has yielded further exciting finds, including coins, glass fragments, copper rings and needles. It is proving a complex area to analyse. The manner in which the stones are set could suggest a shrine or ritual area.



The main interest has centred once again on the Roman “amphitheatre” at the east of the site, which might have been an Iron Age sacred pool and which, while the mystery as to its origin and purpose remains, is referred to as “the big round thing.” The arena, measuring 40 metres in diameter, is surrounded by a Roman built wall, originally plastered and painted, to a depth of 1.5 metres, retained by a bank of earth. A later entrance was made in the wall and it is undecided whether there was a colonnade or a row of

statues on a platform referred to as “the royal box.” This is a low-lying area and a series of drains have been exposed, those to the south being built at a very steep angle into the ground.



Unfortunately, heavy rain during the dig flooded the arena and put a halt to further excavations this year. The extent and reason for the Roman alterations have yet to be revealed and the mystery of “the big round thing” remains till the 2006 season.

Anna Hanslip

The date for the Friends of the Ridgeway site visit in 2006 is Tuesday, 25th July, at 11.00.



All the photos in this issue are courtesy of Kate Crennell

Illustrating the diggings are

- 1 Trench showing possible furnace looking towards Marcham residents 'own' trench where they were learning how to excavate
- 2 A view of 'The Round Thing', this part also flooded, looking towards the bank where the skeletons were found
- 3 Friends looking towards the area which last year was known as 'The Royal Box', the area clearly fills with water very easily, perhaps it was a pool rather than an amphitheatre after all, this year it was just called 'The Round Thing'
- 4 Cobbled area and excited group who had just found a coin

The deplorable scene on page 5 was east of Gore Hill in August

AGM 2006

The 2006 AGM will take place on Sunday 26th March at a new venue The Ridgeway Centre near Wantage. Full details and necessary papers in the Winter Newsletter.

WHITE HORSE TAIL PIECE

Responding to the article in the Summer Newsletter, Birnie Evans reinterpreted the Uffington White Horse

*Its origins are lost in mist
Of ancient time or rumour;
But looking at that drooping tail,
The gaping jaws (And is it male?),
Our thoughts are carried far adrift:
It could just be a puma*

GREEK ROOTS

Any reader whose Greek is as lacy as the editor's might like to be told that the unfamiliar word "temenos" derives from temnein = to cut up. Hence a piece of land separated for a particular purpose, especially a sacred purpose. This can be quite a large tract: Because the Nile was worshipped, its whole valley was a Temenos. Yes, OK, I looked it up in Liddell & Scott.

Contributions to the Winter Newsletter by

31st December please

18, Hampton Park, Bristol BS6 6LH

Ridgewayfriends@aol.com

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

**LIDDINGTON HILL
Greetings Cards**

We have a few packs left of these popular cards from last year, so place your order quickly to avoid disappointment.

ORDER FORM

	Quantity	Amount
Pack of 5 cards plus envelopes		
@ £5 per pack including postage & packing	x £5	£
Donation		£
TOTAL		£

Name and Address for delivery (Please print clearly):

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Please send this form together with a cheque payable to "The Friends of The Ridgeway" to:
Janet Hierons, 34 Oxford Street, Ramsbury, Wiltshire, SN8 2PS.

Thank you for your support.