

FRIENDS OF THE RIDGEWAY
Spring 2006
NEWSLETTER

RITCHIE'S RAMBLINGS

Mixed emotions as I write my piece for this Newsletter.

Firstly I feel elated that there has been a momentous victory for all those who wish to preserve our precious countryside from the ravages of off-road motor vehicles. In past Newsletters I have reported on the passage of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities (NERC) Bill through Parliament. On the 30th March 2006 the Bill received Royal Assent and became an Act. I was asked to chair a new body, the Green Lanes Protection Group, formed to try to influence the impending legislation. After a lot of lobbying, meetings in Parliament, letters to

Also in Issue 72

Effect of TROs	p3
AGM 2006	p4
Photo Competition	p4
Canal Trip	p5
A Ride along The Ridgeway	p5
Mr Territt's two-ox-power horsebox	p8

Website: www.ridgewayfriends.org.uk

Ministers and sheer hard work (not least by your President, Lord Bradshaw), we were delighted that we won some important concessions from the Government. In particular, we persuaded the Government to immediately end the 'horse and cart' principle whereby a footpath or a bridleway can be re-classified as a Byway Open to All Traffic (BOAT) if it can be proved it once carried horse drawn vehicles. When classed as a BOAT, the route can then be used by any form of modern motor vehicle. For years, off-road 4x4 and motor bike enthusiasts have been scouring old Parish records and using this perverse principle to extend their incursions along our ancient network of green lanes. All that will now come to an end.

There is a real benefit for The Ridgeway from NERC. Although at this stage it is only my informed opinion, it is almost certain that the whole of the Trail in West Berkshire and Oxfordshire will soon become motor vehicle free all the year round. I hope to be able to confirm this officially within the next couple of months. Keep your fingers crossed for some very good news!

Why the mixed emotions? Well, at our recent AGM I announced my intention to stand down as your Chairman by the time of our next AGM in March 2007. By then I will have completed six years in the job. Those of you who attended our AGM in Liddington in 2001 may recall that I promised that my Chairmanship would concentrate on ridding The Ridgeway of non-essential motor vehicles. Over the past six years we have achieved a permanent ban on vehicles on the Smeathe's Ridge section of the Trail, and seasonal (seven months of the year) bans on all the Trail in Wiltshire, West Berkshire and Oxfordshire. If my optimism about NERC is justified, the West Berkshire and Oxfordshire stretches will soon become traffic free all year round. Although I will continue to fight for yet further restrictions on motor vehicles until I pass on the baton, I feel that I have probably achieved as much as I am likely to do.

Once we have a Ridgeway that is mainly motor vehicle free, I feel that you need a different set of knowledge, skills and experience in your Chairman.

With the Trail returning to a smooth, grassy, tranquil state, there is an opportunity for someone else to lead The Friends in a different direction. Someone who can introduce the delights of The Ridgeway to a wider public. Someone who knows much more than I will ever do about the history, the geology or the wildlife of the route. Someone with their own ideas to take The Friends on for the next few years. If you think this could be you, give me a call on 01672 520090 or email to ian.ritchie@ukonline.co.uk . I promise you will enjoy it – which explains my mixed emotions!

Ian Ritchie

EFFECTS OF TROs

We asked the National Trails Office to bring us up to date on the effect of the Permanent Season Traffic Regulation Orders. This was the reply:

“Varies across the Trail, at most of the sites we are monitoring, we have noticed a general decrease in motorised vehicle use. Local residents and NT volunteer users are reporting a reduction in use and noise. The exception to this is in Wiltshire at the start of the Trail, and in the East Oxfordshire section (Watlington - Lewknor stretch). Here, we are seeing an increase in traffic - especially in Wiltshire, with up to 150 vehicles being recorded per month. Generally, we are recording between 40 - 150 vehicles using the Trail still during the TROs.

“The photographic survey to assess any damage, further work improvements will be carried out at the end of April. Site inspections so far are showing some damage to the highway authority surface improvement works, specifically in illegal use problem areas, and in extensively used sections. A meeting is being held on the 19th April 06 with the members of the Ridgeway Management Group to discuss further surface improvements, to assess the effectiveness of the TROs, policing, and look at other solutions to resolve the isolated cases of illegal use, continued vehicle use during the TROs and other methods to manage such use. A report of the discussions will be presented at the RW forum meeting”.

The Forum meets early in May, just after the deadline for this Newsletter. On the same day, Fabre Maunsell, a firm of consultants that has been commissioned by government to work on the illegal use of motor vehicles off-road has arranged a “stakeholder meeting”. Doubtless the Summer Newsletter will be a compelling read.

AGM 2006

Once again, I shall tantalize minute lovers by withholding the formal record of the AGM till next February.

What you need to know is that the trustees, including John Templeton, were re-elected. Despite my notice of retirement expressed with classical allusions and demotic verve no one came forward to succeed me. Furthermore, the Chairman and a long-standing committee member, Jane Ebbutt, also announced their departure in 2007.

Peter Gould

One of the informalities of the AGM was the photo competition, won by Janet Hierons. The black and white reproduction below can not do full justice: try the Friends’ website www.ridgewayfriend.org



A RIDE ON THE RIDGEWAY

And surrounding rights of way March 2006

Some fourteen or so months go I wrote a report on a ride eastward from Sparsholt Down to East Ilsley and back through Peasemore, Beedon, Chaddleworth and Leckhamstead on the Downland Villages riding route. At this point the TRQ had been initiated, somewhat halfheartedly, on the Ridgeway. So in March 2006 I thought I should reinspect as the TRO was fully signed last Autumn.

It has of course been an exceptionally dry winter and Sunday, March 12th was no exception; it was extremely cold and very dry underfoot, just above freezing with a chill east wind.

However as I left Sparsholt Firs, having trotted up the Ridgeway by Wixen Bushes where the track has been transformed from its former state into an almost faultless chalk surface with just very slight ruts and a few hoof prints, it was noticeable how many walkers and dog exercisers there were. Considering it was so cold, there were a great many people out and about on their feet. Not a car or motorbike to be seen; and it also remarkable that there have been no

burnt out vehicles all winter either.

I continued east towards Segsbury Down and there were yet more parties of school children, all rosy cheeked and healthy-looking! Still no sign of any motorized vehicles and the surface bore traces of only very light use by wheels. Beyond White House farm the surface is vastly improved; there used to be wall-to-wall rutting here but now there was no trouble finding a good surface to trot and canter on.

And the same situation applied across the road and up past Wantage Monument and onto Scutchamer Knob. From there I was able to canter all the way to Bury Down. A wide stretch and the improved bridlepath strip has remained in tact all the way. When I think how this used to be one corrugated nightmare, it is quite miraculously pleasant for all pedestrians, cyclists and horse riders to use now.

Bury Down car park was quite full and contained the only horse I was to see all day; a lady had been for a short ride but we agreed that the Ridgeway was brilliantly improved. However, one thing did upset me — THE LITTER! Honestly, it looked like something out of a Third World country up there.

CANAL TRIP

Please note there has been a change of date .
This trip will now be on **Sunday 15th July**
Departing from Pewsey Wharf at 2.00pm.
I still have a few places for this visit .

**Return form overleaf to
Jane Ebbutt**

8, Windmill Close , Aldbourne , Marlborough . SN8 2DN

BOOKING FORM FOR CANAL TRIP

NAME/S

ADDRESS

TEL. NO.

I will be arriving by Train Car
(please indicate , transport will be arranged from 1.30pm -1.50
pm from the station.)

I/We enclose a cheque for £. . . . made payable to The Friends of
the Ridgeway

Signed

Mess everywhere, blowing around in the wind. Are we so poor that we cannot afford some sensible scheme to cope with this horror? I should have been so ashamed to bring a foreigner up there.... Anyway — onwards under the A 34 bypass to be greeted by a marvellous sight — what I had described a year previously as looking like the Somme, had been transformed by a strategic bit of ditching and surfacing into a hard, dry, tidy-looking track. Brilliant — well done West Berks'

And the track continued to be in pretty good condition all the way to the bridleway down to East Ilsley. From this village I took the byway up Yewtree Hill and past Woolvers Barn —meeting four silver bearded Trailbikers in the copse —they of course had every right to be there and were models of politeness but nevertheless I had reason to curse them since the track becomes hopelessly rutted past Wolvers Barn and I was really forced to ride on the field headland since there was no footing for the horse amongst so many narrow tyre tracks. Curiously enough after the Redlane Barn house the byway wasn't quite so bad, though wet and then I turned right handed into the section that was resurfaced a few years ago, with great relief

I really think there is a strong case for hard surfacing all the byways; each one that has been done is now pleasant to walk, ride and cycle on and probably boring for motorised users. Certainly the contrast between that section and the new bit that has been sent off the East Hendred Estate track into the woods, to the north, which is a mess, is marked. And the part beyond the bridleway section into the Catmore bluebell woods, which was restored — what — ten, twelve years ago, is still excellent — only marred by a heap of fly tipping at the road entrance. And then down I went to World's End and up the lovely rising bridlepath back to the Ridgeway.

All in all, a most satisfactory outing! And, now, just to make my day, there is a huge resurfacing project to eliminate the 'wallow' on my own Sparsholt field intersection. My dogs will miss the gungey puddle which they used to use to cool themselves in after a ride but it will look so much better.

And, so many thanks to Oxfordshire and West Berks — we are really getting there!

Oh, my day was well and truly made because, just I had crossed the road at Gramps Hill, I heard a roar of engines. I turned my horse and saw six or so motorbikers. I pulled out my phone (I have PC Hale's number on it, at his invitation) and faced them. With very little hesitation, they all reversed and went back the way they had come. It was a good moment. Someone has told them that breached the TRO puts three points on a licence

Penny Reid



Artist's impression of Mr Territt's bullock drawn horsebox
In 1816, the world's first
Beryl Maile in *Aspects of the Wessex Ridgeway*

**Contributions to the Summer Newsletter by
15th July 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