

FRIENDS OF THE RIDGEWAY  
Summer 2006  
NEWSLETTER

**RITCHIE'S RAMBLINGS**

In the past I have been critical of the position taken by the Ridgeway National Trails Office (NTO) on the use of the Trail by motor vehicles. At times it seemed that the NTO and the local authorities along the route were bending over backwards to accommodate the off-roaders. It is time to recognise a clear change in their position and to congratulate them on what they are now doing.

The Friends of The Ridgeway must take much credit for maintaining the pressure that brought about the seasonal Traffic Regulation Orders that have been in place for the past two winters. In addition we have helped

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Website: [www.ridgewayfriends.org.uk](http://www.ridgewayfriends.org.uk)

to bring about a change in Rights of Way law that has big implications for The Ridgeway in Oxfordshire and West Berkshire. Against this background, and the growing public concern about increasing recreational motor vehicle use in the countryside, the NTO has acted.

They are erecting clear new signs that clarify which sections of the Trail are banned to motor vehicles. They have liaised with the police authorities covering the Trail to ensure that the law is enforced and that off-roaders who deliberately flout the regulations will be prosecuted (there is more about how you can help with this elsewhere in this Newsletter). They are developing relationships with communities along The Ridgeway to listen to the problems experienced at a local level. They have produced an excellent informational leaflet explaining to off-roaders where they can and can't go. Perhaps the best indicator of their intentions are the opening words of this leaflet: *The Ridgeway National Trail is managed and promoted to provide a high quality experience for walkers, cyclists and horse riders.* I have no hesitation in giving them the support of our Society in achieving this objective.

Ian Ritchie

**MOTOR VEHICLES ON THE RIDGEWAY**

This is probably a good time to reflect on the changes that we have helped bring about. When we started our current campaign some five years ago, approximately 45 miles of the 85 miles of The Ridgeway were legally accessible to motor vehicles year round. As most readers will know, this resulted in severe destruction of the surface of the Trail, making it at best difficult and unpleasant for walkers, cyclists and horse riders to use, and at worst in some places impossible. In addition the presence of the motor vehicles brought in its wake noise, fumes and disturbance to wildlife.

There are now only 3 miles of The Ridgeway that are open to motor vehicles all year round. These are from Fox Hill to Bishopstone, in the area of Swindon Borough. In addition there are a further 14 miles of the Trail that are open to vehicles for five months of the year, from 1<sup>st</sup> May to 30<sup>th</sup> September. These are mainly in Wiltshire, from Overton Hill to Upper Upham, and in West Berkshire, from Compton Downs to Streatley.

(For the pedants amongst our readers, all the above figures ignore the short sections where The Ridgeway follows the ordinary road network, for example when crossing the M4 or going through the centre of Streatley and Goring.)

Naturally we are very pleased with the success we have had but we still have ambitions of making The Ridgeway a vehicle free zone. Our immediate target is to persuade Swindon Borough Council to follow the lead of Wiltshire and West Berkshire and to make the Fox Hill section subject to a winter ban. Watch this space!

Ian Ritchie

### **THE BENEFITS OF ENGINEERING?**

I just thought I'd drop you a line and let you know about what could be a new development with the types of vehicle using the Ridgeway. Now that the Ridgeway surface has been vastly improved in many parts and because of the current dry weather, whilst out on the Ridgeway yesterday, there was a number of normal vehicles that were attempting to get along it. I counted 6 in the afternoon, an Audi TT, a people carrier and a Mercedes saloon car and a posh Mercedes SUV on the section between the Blowing Stone road to Lambourne and the Sparsholt end by the big ariel opposite where they fly the model aeroplanes, a Ford Focus, and the same Mercedes saloon on the Foxhills to Bishopstone section. I appreciate that they have every right currently to go along there at present, but these are not the normal types of vehicles that you would expect to see using the Ridgeway, so I hope it's not the start of a new trend with people using it as a road because of the improved surface. I personally wouldn't like to use an Audi TT up there, and I don't know how far it got or if they had to come back the way they'd come. I assume that because of the signs saying the Ridgeway is open from the end of April to October, that people are maybe assuming it's a proper road, or maybe it's shown on their satellite navigation systems! Anyway, I hope it's not the start of more cars attempting to use it, as to me it should be for walkers, horse riders and cyclists who are environmentally friendly to the Ridgeway.

Geoff Nash

### **NOTES FROM THE NTO**

The National Trails Officer has told us of the plans to enforce traffic regulations on The Ridgeway

“The aim this year will be to organise joint police authority patrols specifically for managing vehicles driving along TRO and Restricted Byway sections, and to target problem areas and intercept use, rather than try to cover the whole of The Ridgeway. Police Community Support Officers are involved, as are local neighbourhood Police Constables, to ensure all local policing officers are informed and trained to deal with this problem on a day-to-day basis.

“Information and warning notices will be handed to the public (by the police) whilst the signage is being implemented. The existing TRO signs will remain in place in Oxfordshire and West Berkshire to clarify the restrictions for vehicles, with 'Restricted Byway Only' plates covering the existing date plates on the signs. Oxfordshire expect to complete the signing by the end of August, West Berkshire during August/September. All signs will be in place by the beginning of October 06.

“The National Trails team are looking to replace all the Ridgeway recycled plastic fingers in Oxfordshire and West Berkshire (over 100 signposts), currently stating Ridgeway, with fingers stating 'Restricted Byway'. We have found a number of suitable contractors, and are awaiting final costings to submit to the Countryside Agency to fund. We were not provided with any additional funding this year to address the need for the extra signs. This project will be completed as and when funds become available.

“Landowners and local communities will also be involved in liaison and hopefully in monitoring the use within their own sections. This approach is similar to that of the Kent Police Authority (presentation given at the last forum meeting). Although cameras and video evidence will not be used, each policing area has agreed to collate and share information on vehicles intercepted, and will be issuing warning letters to those found driving within restricted area.

“The policing of The Ridgeway will be given publicity, before, during and after the patrols to ensure the public/users are informed of progress/action taken by the police.

“A leaflet detailing sections of The Ridgeway that can be driven, those with restrictions upon them, details on Traffic Regulation Orders and Restricted Byways and alternative places to drive is being handed out by the police and is also available on the National Trails Office website.

“Here are the relevant contacts from July 2006:

Policing Areas

Wiltshire Constabulary Area

□ Overton Hill to Barbury Castle and Ogbourne St George to Upper Upham - Marlborough Station. PC Mike Thorne. Tel: 01672512311. mike.thorne@wiltshire.pnn.police.uk

□ Barbury Castle/Smeathes Ridge to Ogbourne St George - Highworth Station. Sgnt Max Sharman. PC Mike Thorne to liase with.

Thames Valley Police Area

□ Ashbury to Scutchamers (Oxon) - Wantage Station. PC Darren James. Tel: 01235 776048. darren.james@thamesvalley.pnn.police.uk PCSO Mike Clayden (covers East and West Hendreds, Lockinge Estate, patrols Chain Hill and Scutchamers. 01235 861359.

michael.clayden@thamesvalley.pnn.police.uk

□ East Hendred to Compton (West Berks) - Hungerford Station. PC David Giles. Tel:01488 68591/765910. david.giles@thamesvalley.pnn.police.uk Watlington - Lewknor, Chinnor (Oxon) - Watlington Station. PC Ian Kent. Tel: 0845 505 505. ian.kent@thamesvalley.pnn.police.uk PCSO Jacky Madden & PCSO Diane Jackson (Thame and Chinnor area)”

The NTO has also produced a new Ridgeway Transport leaflet for 2006/7 (bus and train times). The NTO decided, rightly I’m sure, that copies of this would be wasted on the Friends of The Ridgeway so there isn’t a copy enclosed, but it is available from The Ridgeway Officer, Countryside Service, Department of Leisure and Arts, Holton, Oxford OX33 1QQ (01865) 810224 and should be on their website.

*Every cloud has a pinchbeck lining. A side effect of government’s cheapskate railway policy may be a better service from the capital and the region of the setting sun to Pewsey, the obvious terminus of The Ridgeway, whatever the NTO says. As through services from London to the southwest are cut back under the new franchise to please the Treasury , a few more trains may run from Reading to Westbury.*

## AFLOAT ON THE K&A

The day for the FoR canal trip was perfect - superb weather, a good turnout of Friends and their friends and relations, and a great cream tea provided by Jane Ebbutt!

*3 photos*

## PHOENICIANS ON THE TRAIL

This Newsletter is always open to interesting speculations, even if the editor doesn't quite believe in them. Jessamy Griffiths sent me a page from Lord Wyfold's *The Upper Thames Valley* (1923) offering an etymology of "Icknield".

"The search for metals that} has happened in our times in Australia, South Africa, and Nigeria has been going on since the beginning of history. The older writers are full of references to the search for gold, silver, lead, copper, and tin. Thousands of years ago adventurers came to Ireland prospecting for gold, which was then plentiful in the Wicklow Mountains (Peake). The Mediterranean peoples had heard of the easy winning of alluvial tin in Spain and England, and sent expeditions to find it. Now Greek was the lingua franca of the Mediterranean seaboard—indeed, it was more than that, it was a language universally spoken all over the then known world. . . . These adventurers probably spoke it. It is not to be imagined that these "voyageurs," who had come so far, would return without exploring the land they had reached after such a journey. They may have found the minerals much worse and the climate much better than they had been led to expect. They could only use such roads—almost certainly nameless—as they found.

They would naturally "ask their way."

Now [the nominative plural of the Greek for tracks] written in English characters, is "ichnee" and in making their inquiries as to where the "roads" were leading them, "ichnee" would be the word they used.

The word "eld" is a root word meaning "old." The local inhabitants—at least as ignorant of direction and distance as country people are to-day—in their replies constantly, in all probability, used this word "eld," for even in their days the roads were old.

So, by question and answer, we get the word Ichnee-eld "or Icknield," meaning "trackways of old" or "trackways of the men of old." This derivation may seem far fetched."

Ekwald, the unaccountably Swedish authority on English place names says only that the etymology is uncertain. Does any reader have any ideas?

Peter Gould

## UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD EXCAVATIONS AT MARCHAM/FRILFORD 2006

2006 is the sixth year of the annual 5-week summer 'dig' by Oxford University archaeology students at Frilford, in the parish of Marcham near Wantage, under the direction of Dr Gary Lock.

Once again, the circular structure on the east of the site, referred to as the 'big round thing' (Newsletter Autumn 2005), was opened up. Speculation continues as to whether it was an amphitheatre or a sacred pool. The arena is 40 metres in diameter, surrounded by a wall to a depth of 1.5 metres, the interior of which was plastered and painted pink. It had a series of interior drains, the ones to the south sloping steeply towards the nearby River Ock. This year, work on the western section has revealed an entrance and a pathway into the arena, and also a small building to the west of the bank. Two wooden posts associated with the creation of the drains have been dated 90 AD. This also dates the first phase of the building of the arena wall.

### *Marcham photo 3 Caption*

Trenches 9 & 29 Work on western end of the arena looking south

Excavation of the outer bank of the arena has revealed a stone revetment resting on Iron Age soil surface. Small altars around the outside of the back of the arena show evidence of votive depositories of animal bones including the complete skeleton of a cow with its legs bound, and personal offerings such as tokens, bronze artefacts and jewellery from cheap items to fabulous brooches which were worth a fortune.

The arena is connected by a stone pathway through the 'temenos', the sacred walled temple precinct, with workshops/shops selling artefacts, to the Romano-British temple on the west of the site (excavated in the 1930's). Further excavation of the temenos this year has revealed votive deposits including a plastered altar and shrine next to the bones of a goat buried with a pot. A three-walled building contains furnaces for votive offerings. Another three-walled building facing the pathway between the temenos and the arena contains a furnace which is so clean that it is thought it may have been used solely for a continuously burning sacred flame and which has been irreverently been nicknamed the 'pizza parlour.'

*Marcham photos 2 Caption*

Trenches 9 & 29 Work on western end of arena looking east

Although there were Roman villas scattered throughout the Vale, the area was not a settlement, but purely a religious site, with the temenos being one of the largest known. The area was an important one in the pre-Roman period. An Iron- Age settlement lies underneath the Romano-British temple. In a large cruciform-shaped building of the late 4<sup>th</sup> century AD, coins were found with the Greek chi-rho, the symbol of Christianity, on them. This gives rise to speculation that there was a change from pagan to Christian religion. The site was, however, closed at the end of the 4<sup>th</sup> century.

The project's website is:

[www.arch.ox.ac.uk/research/research\\_projects/marcham](http://www.arch.ox.ac.uk/research/research_projects/marcham)

Anna Hanslip

*and 4 Caption*

Trenches 15, 18 & 32

*Marcham photo 5 caption*

Trenches 15, 18 & 32

### TRAINING WINNERS ON THE DOWNLAND

*The Spring Newsletter showed a horse taking its ease in an ox cart. The drawing originally illustrated this article in Aspects of the Ridgeway (1984).*

Walking the Ridgeway from Wayland's Smithy to Letcombe Castle one's eye is struck by the miles and miles of rolling downland. It is turf, so well drained by the chalk beneath, which caused the area to become the home of so many racing stables. A horse's legs are the most easily damaged part of its anatomy and can be ruined by galloping on hard or very soft ground, so that the ready availability of well—drained, springy turf is essential. It is not surprising that there are now some forty training stables in the Lambourn area alone and only Newmarket can boast a larger equine population.

Newmarket's rise to fame owed much to royal patronage, Charles II being a most ardent adherent of racing which was starting to become a popular sport in the 1660s. About 1830 owners started to move their horses away from Newmarket because they thought that the going on the gallops became too firm in the summer, and in consequence too many horses broke down. In fact this may have been more often due to the severe training methods of some trainers, like Bill Chifney who thought nothing of working a horse eight miles, two or even three times a week. Newmarket's loss was Berkshire's gain and the area became one of the fashionable training centres in the south of England

during the middle of the century. It has remained so to this day and the Queen Mother has the majority of her jumpers trained by Fulke Walwyn at Upper Lambourn.

Before the existence of the railways, horses had to be walked to race meetings which obviously limited the courses at which they could run, unless the process was to take many days, which was hardly calculated to do them much good. In 1836, that tough mare Cyprian trained by John Scott at Malton was walked 500 miles on her month—long journey to and from Epsom where she won the Oaks. The credit for the first “horsebox” is generally given to a Mr Territt who in 1816 fitted springs to a bullock cart and conveyed his horse “Sovereign” at the rate of forty miles a day from Worcestershire to Newmarket to run in the Two Thousand Guineas.

His example does not seem to have been copied, however, until 1836 when Lord George Bentinck landed a coup with his horse “Elis” in the St Leger at Doncaster by constructing a van drawn by six post—horses, which id the journey from Goodwood in three days, a feat which the bookmakers of the day had thought impossible.

Although the magnet of the Lambourn chalk turf has existed for thousands of years, the other essential for racing on a national scale, namely quick and comfortable transport, has only existed since 1898 when the Lambourn Valley Railway was inaugurated. The advent of the motorised horsebox and the motorways has made possible the great expansion in the number of training establishments in the area during the last forty years. Nowadays it is the turf and the trainers~ and jockeys' skill which determine whether the winner of the Derby or the Grand National is trained at Lambourn.

Dick Rykens  
Lambourn

#### Contributions to the Autumn Newsletter by

**15th October please**

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**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