

FRIENDS OF THE RIDGEWAY



Winter

2007

NEWSLETTER

RITCHIE'S RAMBLINGS

Some time ago I announced my intention to step down as Chairman of your society. My reasoning was simple. I had been elected on a platform of fighting the battle to get off-road motor vehicles banned from using The Ridgeway. Over the last six years we have achieved more than even I expected when I took up the post. Most of The Ridgeway is now free of motor vehicles and the focus of your society must turn to other matters. Having been so intimately involved with the motor vehicle campaign, I decided that it was time for me to pass the Chair on to someone who would take us in a new direction.

In addition to seeking my successor, we have also been looking for a new Secretary and a new Executive Committee member to replace the very long serving stalwarts, Peter Gould and Jane Ebbutt. I am delighted to say that we have found two very impressive new recruits to fill these posts, and they will be presented for election at the next AGM. By contrast the search to replace me has been singularly unsuccessful!

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Website: www.ridgewayfriends.org.uk

Naturally I have given this situation much thought. My first concern is to ensure that our society continues to function and prosper. Secondly, I am convinced there is another huge challenge facing The Friends of The Ridgeway. I believe The Ridgeway is a National Trail that is under used, under appreciated and under resourced. As I pondered this disappointing analysis, I realised that it was something that I would like to help to change.

I have therefore decided to put myself up for re-election as your Chairman at the next AGM. In doing so it is my intention to spell out my manifesto, in the same way as I did six years ago when I pledged that we would fight and beat the off-roaders.

My vision is for The Ridgeway to become the most loved and most used National Trail in the country, with walkers, cyclists, horse riders, historians, geologists, bird watchers, indeed everyone being able to appreciate its special qualities in peace. If this appeals to you, then I would be grateful for your support at the AGM, and I promise that I will work as hard towards this objective as I did on the motor vehicle campaign.

NERCA UPDATE

Regular readers will recall that the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006 (NERCA) has been enthusiastically welcomed by The Friends of The Ridgeway. Part of the provisions of NERCA relate to rights of way, and in particular the introduction of the new category of Restricted Byway. Most of The Ridgeway in Oxfordshire and West Berkshire has now become a Restricted Byway and as such is now free of motorised vehicles.

As ever with a new piece of legislation, there are one or two provisions of the Act where there could be difficulties in interpretation. Through the Green Lanes Protection Group (of which we are members and I am Chairman), we commissioned a QC to give us an opinion on these matters. We used one of the leading rights of way specialists, George Laurence QC, and your society made a donation to his costs.

Naturally, the opinion is complex and of most interest to rights of way anoraks! The key issues that concern us are around where the burden of proof lies in outstanding claims to reclassify routes as Byways Open to All Traffic (BOATs). We are pleased that the burden of proof in such cases falls on the claimant (i.e. usually the off-roaders) and not upon objectors (i.e. groups like us). We are also pleased that our interpretation of the 'user test' (the test to decide what the principal use of route has been in the five years running up to NERCA) has proved correct in the eyes of George Laurence.

Members who suffer from insomnia are welcome to email me at ian.ritchie@ukonline.co.uk to request a full copy (all 30 pages!) of the opinion!

Ian Ritchie

THE RIDGEWAY BASE

In the December 2006 Newsletter you ask about the end-points of the Ridgeway Base. The short answer is that this ran from White Horse Hill (SU 30083 86375) to Liddington Castle (SU 20982 79752). There are trig points marking the end points of the line, which is 11,260 metres (plus a few centimetres) long.

At that time (1935) the Ordnance Survey (OS) needed a new baseline in central southern England. The previous one north of Salisbury was no longer satisfactory as the end points were not intervisible (i.e. you could not see one from the other). The requirements for the new baseline included intervisible end points about that distance apart (most baselines were between 8 and 12 km), with open and fairly quiet country in between. (No M4 in those days!) No doubt the presence of the bridleway itself was an advantage, although of course the actual measuring would have been in an absolutely straight line, not along the Ridgeway Path. It may have been a bonus, though it would not have been necessary, that the baseline was not very far from 2° W, which is the 'origin' of the National Grid (the grid line at 2° W is the only one which points *exactly* true north).

I should explain that for two centuries or more, mapping of large areas depended on 'triangulation'. If all three angles of a triangle are measured accurately (which is, in principle, easy to do if all three corners are intervisible), and if the length of one side is known, then the lengths of the other two sides can be calculated precisely. Even if no length is known, the triangulation determines the *ratio* of all the lengths. So by triangulating (measuring all the angles) from the trig points across the entire country, *all* distances, directions and locations can be established if the length of just *one* side of *one* triangle is known. Thus it is vital to measure that one side as accurately as possible: that measured side is known as the Base or Baseline. (In practice the OS would measure at least one more Base, far removed from the primary one, to provide a check on the calculations.) At a local level, locations were found by reference to nearby trig points and bench marks.

For those who recall their spherical trigonometry, I just add that the angles of each *individual* triangle will sum to 180°, because any one triangle is flat. However the sum of *all* the angles recorded at any one point will be *very slightly* less than 360°, because the earth is spherical (or nearly so), not flat. The difference is trivial at any one spot, but (if not allowed for in the calculations) would be catastrophic over an area as large as the United Kingdom.

The Ridgeway Base was formally measured in November and December 1937, and was remeasured in October 1951: the two measures differed by only 6.6mm! The Liddington Castle end point, at 277m, was the highest of all the bases used by the OS.

Readers may be interested to know that the baseline was divided into 18 sections (the length varying somewhat with the terrain). Each section was then measured with tapes which were 24m long but only 3mm wide. Three or more readings of each 24m stretch (known as a 'bay') were taken and they had to agree to within 0.2mm before the surveyors moved to the next bay. How this was achieved in practice I cannot even begin to explain.

The Ridgeway Base did have some disadvantages. Several sections had steeper slopes than were regarded as ideal for a base; also at 249825 a ravine about 100m wide and 15m deep had to be 'bridged' and measured without prejudice to the overall accuracy. Odstone Barn at 280849 was exactly on the line of the base; this obstacle was dealt with by threading the tapes through holes cut in the walls of the barn! Finally the ditches and ramparts of the hill forts at each end presented problems especially when readings were being made in windy weather. Even so, the resulting distance was estimated to be accurate to within 1 centimetre.

Incidentally the Lossiemouth Base mentioned in your note had first been used in 1909 as a check on earlier work. (Until then there had been no base in Scotland, the previous 'second' primary base being near Lough Foyle in Ireland. Of course Ireland was mapped at a large scale several decades before Scotland.) But after remeasurement in 1938, it was abandoned. At only 7.17 km it was short, the ground was rough, and because it was close to and parallel with the Moray Firth it could only be 'locked in' to the triangulation from one side. Instead a new base was established in Caithness and measured in 1952. At 24.8 km this is by far the longest of any OS base. It is a testimony to the accuracy of the surveyors in those pre-GPS days that the length of the Caithness Base as determined by the triangulation all the way from the Ridgeway differed from the measured length by less than half a metre!

David Purchase

References

- 1 *The Bases of the Ordnance Survey* by Peter Haigh, *Sheetlines* no. 62, pp. 45 – 56 (2001). [*Sheetlines* is the journal of The Charles Close Society for the study of Ordnance Survey Maps.]
- 2 *History of the Retriangulation of Great Britain* by the Ordnance Survey (HMSO 1967). [Any reader fortunate enough to see a copy of this book will be rewarded by several photographs of the measurements of the Ridgeway Base, including the antics in the ravine, which to modern eyes are rather entertaining.]

AGM

To save money and paper, the committee decided not to circulate the formal agenda papers with the newsletter this year. (The agenda and formal notice is on the back page of this Newsletter.)

Accounts for the year ended 31 December 2006 with Trustees' Report have been audited and were approved by the Trustees on 13 February 2007.

Copies of the Annual Report, Accounts and 2006 AGM minutes may be obtained from the Secretary Peter Gould,

18, Hampton Park,

Bristol BS6 6LH;

Ridgewayfriends@aol.com

or the Treasurer and will also be available at the Annual General Meeting.

Lunch Please return the booking form overleaf to Jane Ebbutt,

8 Windmill Close,

Aldbourne, Nr Marlborough,

Wilts SN8 2DN

by **14th March** with your payment and an S.A.E.

Nomination of Trustees Distributing nomination forms to a dispersed membership did not work last year. The constitution requires trustees to be nominated fourteen days before the meeting. If you want to stand for election and have not already made your interest known, please contact the Secretary by **10th March**.

Transport If you want a lift from Didcot station to the hall, please return the booking form overleaf to Janet Hierons

34 Oxford Street,

Ramsbury,

Wilts SN8 2PS

by **14th March**

DATA PROTECTION ACT

Do you object to the Friends holding your membership record on computer? The data is used for membership records, including subscriptions, and label printing. It is not disclosed outside the Friends.

Objections or requests for more information to

Ridgewayfriends@aol.com or in writing to the Secretary.

18 Hampton Park, Redland, Bristol BS6 6LH

AGM LUNCH

Please provide buffet lunch for(*State number*)

NAME/S

ADDRESS

TEL. NO.

I enclose a cheque for £.....made out to The Friends of The Ridgeway. (£5 per head)

AGM TRANSPORT

Please collect (*State number*)

From Didcot Parkway in time for

1 Lunch (Dep 12:25)

2 Meeting (Dep 13:25)

I expect to arrive on thetrain from

NAME/S

ADDRESS

TEL. NO.

**A 40 MILE WALK
ALONG THE WESTERN HALF OF THE RIDGEWAY**

“One of the main ideas of organising this walk is to create interest in the unique character of the downland countryside and to preserve the right of way along this very ancient trackway.” Thus commented Peter Smith of Reading YHA Group on the occasion of the group’s third challenge walk along the Ridgeway between Marlborough and Streatley in 1964.

Friends of the Ridgeway will, I am sure, agree with the ideas expressed by Peter. And you will be glad to know that, today, Reading Group is still inviting people to come to the area to see if they can walk 40 miles in one day.

If are interested in trying your luck at walking from Overton Hill to Streatley at one go on Saturday 12 May, you can obtain further details from Alan Smith, 3 Harlington Road, Bexleyheath, Kent, DA7 4AS (phone 020 8301 3829 or Email jungledrums@waitrose.com). Alternatively, details of the walk and other information can be obtained from the walk’s web site at ridgeway40.org.uk.

**FOR YOUR DIARY
Marcham Excavation guided tour
Wednesday 25th July 11 am**

**Contributions to the Spring Newsletter by
14th April please**

Peter Gould, 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

**ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING
2007**

**Sunday 25th March 2pm
(NB This is the first day of Summertime)
Ridgeway Centre (Ridgeway Youth Hostel).**

1. Apologies
2. Minutes of 2005 AGM
3. Matters Arising
4. Annual Report
5. Treasurer’s Report & Accounts
6. Election of President & Vice-Presidents
7. Election of Executive Committee (Trustees)
Chairman
Secretary
Treasurer
Committee Members (5 including
Membership Secretary
Publicity Officer)
8. Appointment of Auditor
9. Any Other Business

The Ridgeway Centre (Ridgeway Youth Hostel) is on Court Hill, off the A338 south of Wantage. Grid Ref 393851.

As there is no public transport, arrangements have been made to collect members from Didcot Parkway. Please return the booking form in this Newsletter.