

# FRIENDS OF THE RIDGEWAY



Autumn

2007

## NEWSLETTER

### RITCHIE'S RAMBLINGS

I hope that you have been able to get out in some of the recent excellent autumn weather. I have a confession to make. I have been out and about but not on The Ridgeway. In the past few weeks I have walked in The Lakes and along part of Hadrian's Wall. Both were hugely enjoyable in their different ways, but both were characterised by seeing lots of other people also out enjoying themselves. Neither area was crowded to the extent it marred the experience, rather it was pleasing to be amongst others revelling in the delights of some of the best scenery in the country.

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

As you know, with the problems of motor vehicles beginning to recede, an ambition of your Executive Committee is to attract more people to use The Ridgeway for walking, cycling and horse riding. I would like to see similar numbers to those I met on Hadrian's Wall and in parts of The Lakes enjoying the delights of The Ridgeway.

We are starting to develop some exciting ideas to achieve this. One particular possibility we are exploring is to resurrect the vision of a Greater Ridgeway, sweeping across the country from the Dorset coast to East Anglia, following the line of the chalk escarpment. The idea is not new. The concept was advocated by The Ramblers Association many years ago and it was considered at the time of the establishment of the first National Trails. For pragmatic reasons, only an 85 mile section of the Greater Ridgeway was eventually adopted as a National Trail and this, of course, is the route that our Society is concerned with. We believe the time is right to consider whether a unified Ridgeway route, reflecting its ancient origins and perhaps incorporating some of our great historic sites such as Avebury and Stonehenge, should be developed and promoted. We are at the very early stages of our thinking on this and would welcome any comments and suggestions from members.

A very personal thought on National Trails. In the last Newsletter, Peter Gould mentioned the days when Tom Stephenson was the first Chief Executive of The Ramblers' Association. I had the pleasure of meeting Tom Stephenson only once, but it was memorable. The Pennine Way had just been opened as the first National Trail in the early 1960's and a friend and I were walking it. On a damp and misty day we struggled to the top of Cross Fell in the northern Pennines. As we dived behind the crude stone wall shelter at the top, there was Tom! What a great experience to meet the father of the Pennine Way at its highest point. We exchanged a few stories from our walk with him and set off down to the village of Garrigill with him. As we approached the village he came upon his car and offered us a lift for the last mile or so. It was tempting but to this day I am pleased to say that we refused!

Ian Ritchie

AGM 2008  
Ridge way Centre  
Sunday 16th March

## THE FRIENDS OF THE RIDGEWAY WEB-SITE

Those Friends who make use of the Internet, and who regularly (we hope!) consult the Friends of The Ridgeway web-site, at [www.ridgewayfriends.org.uk](http://www.ridgewayfriends.org.uk), will be aware that it has naturally been pre-occupied with making the case for banning off-road vehicles from the Trail. With that battle now largely won, it was clear that some extensive revision of the web-site was called for. The Committee also felt that the opportunity should be taken to review the technical efficiency and facilities offered by the site, and to freshen up its presentation. An extensive refurbishment has accordingly been commissioned, and the work is now nearly complete. It is hoped that by the time you read this the new site will be live, and we urge you to log on and explore its possibilities.

As you will see, the changes include a new “look and feel”, and a revised site menu and structure. An extended About Us section gives more details of the history of the Friends, and of our campaign, and for the first time includes contact details for the Committee. All the recent Newsletters are included as pdf’s, as well as many of the articles separately, as before. A new By The Way section has been set up which it is intended will provide a space for Friends and the interested public at large to browse a wide range of thoughts and articles connected, however loosely, with The Ridgeway and its users. Please understand that this section is at the start of its development, for which we rely on your contributions, and an interactive facility is provided for this purpose, and to enable the Committee to liaise directly with you.

You will also find a new Photo Gallery, which we hope you will take a look at; and we look forward to posting here your own photos, when you send them to us, which will of course all be attributed to you! And last but not least you will find a new Google Map facility, which will enable you to zoom in on the Trail and its points of interest. I’m sure you will find, as I did, that the aerial views of Avebury and the White Horse are absolutely stunning!

We do hope that you enjoy your visit to the new site, and will book-mark it for regular return viewings to see the new material which we aim to add over the next months. We shall be glad to hear your comments, which should be addressed to the writer at [jandjgoddard@googlemail.com](mailto:jandjgoddard@googlemail.com), or to the Editor at [PeterGould18@aol.com](mailto:PeterGould18@aol.com).

## REPORT ON CANAL TRIP

On a warm midday, unusual for this year a group made up of members from the Kennet Valley NT and Friends of the Ridgeway gathered at the Wharf at Bradford-on-Avon to board the Barbara McLellan for a trip along the Kennet and Avon canal towards Bath. We traversed the aqueduct at Avoncliff and went as far as the Dundas aqueduct high above the Avon River and the main railway line. At the Dundas Aqueduct we were able to disembark and walk over the aqueduct to read about the history of the building of the canal and also see the small side branch which transported coal but which is now used as a boatyard. On the return journey a cream tea, all homemade by Jane, was served which helped to raise the spirits as it started to rain.

## FROM THE TRAM SHED

In the last Newsletter Peter Gould made a strong and erudite case for a broad extension of public access to the countryside. It is a case that is difficult to deny, and I don’t. He asserts that footpath access and open access are complementary – I agree. He captures my feelings when he says how thrilling it is to set out on a path that can take you ultimately anywhere. As for his likening of the Rights of Way network to a great cathedral, I only wish I was so creative with my allusions.

Where I differ from Peter is over the hard economic facts of life. Peter says that this country, one of the richest in the world, can afford a few million pounds to improve footpath access and open access. Here I part company with him. Those same ‘few million pounds’ are needed for the NHS, the education system, the police and a whole string of other high profile demands from our society. If one Government budget is increased, another is cut. In the last Newsletter I mentioned the budgetary problems that National England is having, and the likely impact it will have on National Parks, Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty and on National Trails such as The Ridgeway.

My point is simple – how can it be right to let our wonderful network of footpaths and bridleways fall into disrepair in order to fund greater coastal access? If it comes to a choice, as I believe it is likely to, of increasing open access or maintaining the Rights of Way network, than I’m for the network. After all, what is wrong with a well maintained and well used tram network?

This Newsletter is not devoted to the Dismal Science of Political Economy, nor do I pretend to be an expert, but nonetheless here we go.

Briefly, public finance in England is determined by the pushmepullyou between Gladstonian stinginess and the contractors' rip-off culture that dates back at least to Samuel Pepys. In this context, Ian has uncritically accepted the classic Civil Service Question to dithering ministers "Which is better? Apples or Aspirin?" The canny answer is "Anemones, Sir Humphrey". All that can be achieved in the short term by chucking money at the huge apple budget is more expensive apples. (My Doctor is now so well paid his surgery closes more often.) Whereas a small bid for anemones buys a bunch.

Our wonderful PRow network need not fall into disrepair to pay for access. PRow maintenance is a statutory duty for Highway Authorities, basically funded from year to year as a Local Government "revenue" charge; whereas, access is a "one-off" or capital expense for Central Government. Within Government budgets, a few million quid, as I have said before, is petty cash. It certainly won't buy the tramway my native city needs. It wouldn't even pay to upgrade the signalling on a branch railway. As an access budget, though, this money will make a significant difference at a time of unique opportunity.

I'll conclude with a strange irony of political history. Anthony Wedgewood Benn (before he was converted to the environment and set himself up as an Elder Statesman) was responsible for the inconceivably expensive and environmentally indefensible Concorde project. The third generation of this dynasty, Hilary, Secretary of State for the Environment, told the 2007 Labour Party Conference. "we now intend to legislate so that each of us has, for the first time in our history, the right to walk around our coastline from the white cliffs of the South Coast to the wild cliffs of Northumberland."

"And we'll do this because access for all is a Labour value, and it should apply as much to our coast as it does to education or our health service"

Peter Gould

*I have received two letters in support of Ian's opinions which other readers may answer if they choose*

Your points on the current coastal access proposal in the Summer Friends of the Ridgeway newsletter caught my eye as I have just spend a good few hours putting together a Downing St. e-petition to get horse riders included in any future access proposals, including the coastal access proposal.

Equestrians are the most vulnerable of road users, have access to only a small proportion of the rights of way network and usually have to access it using roads from where their horse is kept. Horse riding and driving provides healthy outdoor exercise, is enjoyed by over 4 million people in the UK and is the second biggest land-based industry and yet equestrians have not been included in recent access-creating legislation, eg. CROW Act, which would help make them safer and encourage healthy outdoor recreation.

Enough of the sales-speak. In trying to canvas views of whether to do this petition, I received a viewpoint very similar to your own from a rider based in Hants. Basically it said: 'let's get the public rights of way network into shape first before spending huge sums of money on coastal access'. I understand that Hants County Council are always pleading poverty when it comes to repairing definitive paths, for example, the estimated £120,000 to repair the Wayfarers Way above Highclere after vehicular damage cannot be found.

So, even if you upset some of the Friends and jeopardise your relationship with the Ramblers & Open Spaces Society, you will have some support amongst the horse riding fraternity!

Our petition is now worded using the current coastal access proposal as an example but pressing for horse riders to be included in all new access legislation. After all, this would give better value than if it is just for walkers. However, it would require walkers to share with others, something that the other non-motorised groups have to do on all rights of way.

There can be no better way of experiencing the countryside than on horseback in the many people's eyes. We would be pleased if the Friends of the Ridgeway felt it could promote the petition which can be found on <http://petitions.pm.gov.uk/Equestrianaccess/>. However, no matter if this is not the Friends policy.

*Supporting the petition is beyond the scope of the Friends, but we are happy to draw attention to it. Ed*

Ian Ritchie asked for thoughts on his views, which I notice you do not share. Sadly for you I am in total agreement with him.

This summer I visited Ceridigion, where there is a very controversial programme to extend the coastal path. In my view it makes no sense. There already is a coastal path along large sections of the Welsh coast. In the area where it is being enforced by compulsory purchase at derisory rates there is no reasonable vehicular access despite it being a dead end. At the same time it will be disruptive to a rare breads farm, which has been open to the public for many years.

I cannot help thinking that Project Neptune opened up enough of our coastline for most purposes. If more is wanted it is unjust to use expropriation powers to obtain it. There is a huge amount still to be done to safeguard our unsurfaced public paths of all sorts for quiet enjoyment by the wildlife and by the great majority of people who enjoy it that way.

I still live in hopes that Wiltshire County Council will extend the ban on the Ridgeway to the whole year and to other badly damaged BOATs surrounding it.

Finally open access for people is less harmful to wildlife when people are unaccompanied by free roaming dogs. In this area at least few come without dogs and even fewer keep their dogs under control while roaming.

Michael Maude



**CORRECTION** One paragraph in the last Newsletter didn't make sense, not because the editor wrote it. It obeyed Murphy's Special Law of Proof Reading which states "If you correct one mistake it is highly probable that you will make at least one new one." Obeyed before it was promulgated, Murphy's Special Law was a very valuable law that has kept textual critics happily employed for many centuries. The pecuniary rewards are modest, but the job satisfaction, largely derived from slugging off other textual critics, is immense. If Untin is the image of war without its guilt and only twenty five percent of its danger, textual criticism is the sublimation of croquet with all its vicious subtlety and no risk of hayfever. And if you haven't read A E Housman on editing Manilius, cancel Christmas, enjoy yourself instead, then tell me I'm wrong.

Oh yes the correction. The scrambled paragraph in the article on Alfred should read "Hard though it may be to place this scene, the description fits well with the scene we would expect when walking along the Ridgeway on a winter day. The battle of Ashdown was fought by Alfred while his brother Ethelred was still king, and was a famous victory over the Danish invaders. The Danes had crossed the country from East Anglia in mid-winter and dug themselves in at Reading between the two rivers. Alfred attacked them and then they followed his force across the Downs, turning upwards from the Thames perhaps at Cholsey towards Scutchamer Knob. The results of the victory were short-lasting, and it was only after long tribulation that Alfred defeated them again, decisively at Ethandun (Edington) in 878 A.D. This was again on the Downs but further south, near Battlesbury Camp on the Edge of Salisbury Plain".

**Contributions to the Winter Newsletter by  
14th January please**

Mud-free photos, sketches, cartoons would be appreciated  
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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