

FRIENDS OF THE RIDGEWAY

Winter



2008

NEWSLETTER

RITCHIE'S RAMBLINGS

In my last Ramblings I indicated that, now we have achieved considerable success in eliminating recreational motor vehicle use on The Ridgeway, your Committee is turning its thinking to two related issues – the development of the concept of the Greater Ridgeway and the challenge of getting more people out to sample its delights. In this Newsletter you will read of a very positive step we are taking towards these twin aims. Thanks largely to some hard work by your Secretary, Jeff Goddard, we are exploring the establishment of what we are calling the Great Stones Way. Running southwards from the western end of the Ridgeway National Trail at Overton Hill, then above the Avon Valley to Stonehenge and perhaps beyond, we see this as being a great venture in its own right but also an important element in our aspiration for a well used Greater Ridgeway. Read the article and let us have your comments.

Also in Issue 79

| | |
|------------------------------|----|
| The Great Stone Way | p2 |
| Website Update | p5 |
| The Trail at Avebury | p5 |
| Data Protection Act | p6 |
| Marcham 2008- | p7 |
| 40 Miles on Foot | p7 |
| Electrical Works at Sreatley | p7 |
| The Glorious Uncertainty | p8 |

Website: www.ridgewayfriends.org.uk

On a personal note, I have resigned as Chairman of the Green Lanes Protection Group. This body comprises seventeen organisations, including The Friends of The Ridgeway, that came together to influence the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Bill as it went through Parliament. It was GLPG's success that brought about (amongst many other valuable things) the immediate introduction of a new category of Right of Way, the Restricted Byway. At a stroke this meant that long sections of The Ridgeway in West Berkshire and Oxfordshire became no-go areas for motor vehicles. As well as trying to hold together a disparate bunch of organisations, my main contribution as Chairman was in the areas of political lobbying and representation. That work is now largely complete and it is time for me to move on. I am, however, joining the committee of the Green Lanes Environmental Action Movement (GLEAM), so I will be remaining in touch with nationwide issues of motor vehicles in the countryside. If this is something that troubles you, perhaps on Rights of Way in your area, then I strongly recommend that you look at the GLEAM website (www.gleam-uk.org) and think about supporting this worthy body.

The recent poor weather has curtailed my regular Ridgeway walking but I must mention seeing an enormous flock of Golden Plover that wheeled overhead on Hackpen Hill on a wet and windy day. A memorable sight as they performed their aerobatics at high speed. Whatever the weather there is always something special to see on The Ridgeway!

A belated Happy New Year to you all.

Ian Ritchie

THE GREAT STONE WAY

A walker along The Ridgeway from the north will reach the present end of the Trail on the A4 at Overton Hill, with the Sanctuary across the road, Silbury Hill just over the shoulder of the hill, and the mysterious stone circle of Avebury a mile away down the Stone Avenue to the north-west. Despite these numinous surroundings, it seems a strange place for the path to end. Surely the Sanctuary is not the destination? In truth, of course, the end of the National Trail is simply a convenient point for access to this prehistoric trading route, and we need to look beyond the Sanctuary, southwards along the line of the ancient path. Where is it heading? A glance at the map shows the path heading down across the Wansdyke towards the Vale of Pewsey, and the bulk of Salisbury Plain beyond. Due south, down the Avon Valley lie the great

stones of Stonehenge; and modern archaeology indicates that both Avebury and Stonehenge were in contemporaneous use over more than a millennium, as the ritual centre of the Atlantic Neolithic and Bronze Age henge civilisation, between 5,000 and 3,600 years ago. This must have been a mighty civilisation, and it appears that this part of Wessex was at the centre of it and a focus for North-west European trade. The ancient Ridgeway trail, running along the chalk escarpments for ease of passage, and joining Avebury/Stonehenge to harbours on the Dorset and Norfolk coasts, would have formed the principal axis for trade between the Wessex centre and the rest of the Atlantic civilisation between Galicia and Norway. The main route, or a principal branch of it, must surely have run between Avebury and Stonehenge, and it is astonishing that no way-marked path exists today between these great megalithic monuments, notwithstanding the intervening Salisbury Plain military reserves. Let us imagine one, and dub it “The Great Stone Way”.

The OS Explorer map shows the Ridgeway continuing south as far as Alton Priors, and Timperley and Brill’s authoritative “Ancient Trackways of Wessex” follows the route past Broad Street and Wilsford to Broadbury Banks on the edge of the Plain, and the start of the military area. Here the path divides, with one branch heading due west along the edge of the Plain over Redhorn Hill, to join the Wessex Ridgeway at Penning Down. The other branch heads south and east past Casterley Camp, and thence eastwards as the Inkpen Ridgeway to Basingstoke. Timperley and Brill identify a likely track from the western branch of The Ridgeway at Redhorn Hill to Stonehenge across the middle of the Plain, past Ell Barrow and Robin Hood’s Ball; but this route is nowadays blocked by the military area. However, an alternative alignment, which is more direct although hillier, may have followed the higher ground west of the Avon valley, along the edge of the Danger Area. The Avon Valley is thought to be part of the likely transport route from Wales for the Stonehenge bluestones, but the valley itself is of course, now as then, too congested to be a feasible route for normal passage on foot.

Clearly any route across Salisbury Plain would need the approval of the military authorities, both as landlords and on account of safety. They are unlikely to concede any reduction in the flagged Danger Area. However, a new route following but outside the line of red flags may provide a clear demarcation for the Danger Area and an easily monitored boundary path. Dedication of a way-marked Trail across the Plain, compensating for the

ancient rights of way across the Plain now lost to the public, would also be a welcome gesture showing the authorities' awareness of public pressure for reasonable access.

A path approaching Stonehenge along the Avon Valley would have the advantage of passing near to Durrington Walls and Woodhenge, and possibly along the Avenue ceremonial way, monuments of comparable archaeological value to Stonehenge itself, but more rarely visited. Here and at Stonehenge itself English Heritage and the National Trust are the guardians concerned, but an improvement in pedestrian access is likely to be welcome, provided it is properly controlled.

Beyond Stonehenge, there are inviting routes leading southwards to re-cross the Avon at Durnford, and thence above the east bank to the ancient earthwork of Old Sarum. We may also envisage a link across the famous Mill Meadows in Salisbury and along the northern escarpment of Cranborne Chase, by the old Salisbury Ox Drove, to White Sheet Hill and Win Green to join the Wessex Ridgeway.

A new "Great Stone Way" long-distance path linking Avebury and Stonehenge must be attractive to any walker interested in these mysterious ancient monuments, and the megalithic civilisation in Wessex. The path would provide an attractive alternative route to the Wessex Ridgeway for walkers following the ancient Ridgeway trail, which would not only give access to the major heritage attractions of Stonehenge and its environs, but also to the City and Cathedral of Salisbury and historic Old Sarum. Its extension along Cranborne Chase would create, with the Wessex Ridgeway, a magnificent circular route around the main chalk escarpments in Wiltshire, with all their ancient monuments. The path would link the Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty in the North Wessex Downs to those in Cranborne Chase and West Wiltshire, and in Dorset.

In the modern world, facilities for outdoor recreation and enjoyment of the countryside are increasingly important, and walking provides fitness benefits with minimum environmental impact. Long-distance walking has increasing numbers of adherents, not only from this country but from overseas, and the economic benefits for communities along the routes can be considerable. The creation of The Great Stone Way as a new, way-marked path should be a high priority both for those promoting tourism and rural economic growth, and for anyone concerned with health and countryside access.

WEB-SITE UP-DATE

Those of you who use our web-site, www.ridgewayfriends.org.uk, will have found recently a whole new battery of information within the Users Guide pages of the site – just click through to “Walking The Ridgeway”. We have been proud to welcome Anthony Burton, the author of the standard Aurum Press National Trail Guide to the Ridgeway, 2005 edition, who has written for us a shortened version of his Guide, giving a real flavour of each section of the Trail. Do try this new descriptive commentary; we’re sure you will enjoy it.

Anthony has also recently produced on DVD, with Bonza TV, a video guide to The Ridgeway, and we are pleased to be able to use within these new pages of the Users Guide section of the web-site some excellent photos which are stills from his film, available from www.TVWalks.com. Moreover, Anthony and Bonza TV have kindly agreed to give members of the Friends of The Ridgeway a discount of 25% on purchases of The Ridgeway Guide DVD. Anyone interested will be able to access this site through the link on our web-site, and should quote the confidential discount Code FTR25 when the box appears on the payment page. Alternatively, or additionally, we shall be offering copies of the DVD for purchase, also at a discount, at the AGM on 16th March. We hope you find it enjoyable viewing!

Jeff Goddard

THE TRAIL AT AVEBURY

Following concerns over how The Ridgeway National Trail through the Avebury World Heritage Site can be maintained to meet statutory requirements and to keep it in good repair to the exacting requirements of Natural England a meeting was arranged with those with an interest in The Ridgeway and the Avebury World Heritage Site. Their aim was to work together to determine and implement acceptable standards for the repair and maintenance of the surface of The Ridgeway National Trail in ways that protect and preserve the environmental factors which merit World Heritage Site status.

The meeting was arranged to let all interested parties share their knowledge of The Ridgeway and come up with a management plan to maintain the surface, in good condition and to reduce further degradation of the archaeology.

The existing Seasonal Traffic Regulation Order has proved itself to be only partially successful, in that it has reduced but not eliminated use by motor-vehicles between the beginning of October and the end of April. This measure will continue though bolstered by the erection of gates at Hackpen Hill and at Overton Hill plus further liaison with the police at Marlborough over enforcement.

A localised management plan will now be developed following precise and detailed GIS surveys of the route with solutions appropriate to each section dependant on the archaeology and the intensity of the damage. Movement of materials to and from the site will be minimised, as will excavation and an archaeologist will be on site to maintain a “watching brief” when work commences.

It is hoped that the repair programme will take place over a maximum period of five years, but this will be subject to sufficient funds being available. Repair techniques will vary from doing nothing at all in the few locations where no significant damage is evident to the filling of ruts, regrading, building up the surface and in rare instances, excavation.

Those involved in the discussions include:

Wiltshire County Council (Rights of Way)
Wiltshire County Council (Archaeology Service)
Avebury World Heritage Site Officer
National Trails Officer (Route Management)
Natural England
Professor Peter Fowler, Emeritus Professor of Archaeology, University of Newcastle and member of Avebury WHS Steering Committee
Gillian Swanton, Co- Chair of Avebury (WHS) Archaeological and Historical Research Group, member of Avebury WHS Steering Committee and landowner
North Wessex Downs AONB
The National Trust

Paul Broadstock

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.

Dr Gary Lock of Oxford Institute of Archaeology has agreed to conduct a tour for FoR members round the Marcham/Frilford excavation site 10 miles outside of Oxford on the A338, behind the former Noah's Ark (Pub)." on Wednesday 23 July 2008 at 11.00

40 MILES ON FOOT IN ONE DAY

Reading Outdoor Group is holding its 40 mile walk from Overton Hill to Streatley on Saturday, 10th May 2008.

The route covers most of the Ridgeway National Trail between those two points except for a small diversion along other tracks between Barbury Castle and Whitefield Hill.

The challenge of this event is to complete the 40 mile route at one go (in practice between 08.00 and 22.30)

Transport from Streatley to the start can be booked and checkpoints along the way monitor the progress of walkers and provide refreshments.

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.

Alan Smith

ELECTRIC CABLE WORKS AT STREATLEY

We have been advised by the Electricity Alliance, a partnership between National Grid and the major contractors Babcock, Amec and Mott McDonald, that essential work is due to commence in January this year to replace the underground power cable between the existing sub-stations at Moulsoford Down and Lewington Wood near Streatley. The project will not be complete until October 2009, but the main works are programmed for summer 2008, during which period there will be increased construction traffic to and from the site office near Goring and Streatley Golf Club on the B4009. The Alliance promises that safety will be a priority, and that they aim to minimise disruption to the local community

project leaflet are promised for local residents, and will be available from the community relations team at 6 Whiteladies Road, Clifton, Bristol, BS8 1PD, or on 0800 073 1047. The Project Manager is Walter Riddle.

We shall be interested to hear from members if there are any problems caused by the works, beyond the inevitable impact on the peace of the countryside while they are in progress, and will be pleased to do what we can to help.

THE GLORIOUS UNCERTAINTY

Courtesy of GLEAM, we have learned about a new legal ingenuity. When laying out new enclosure roads in the mid 19thC, surveyors had steam engines in mind, therefore, such roads should not be Restricted Byways, but carriageways, open to 4WD. I hoped to print the historical counter argument but must hold it over till spring for lack of space.

As a sop to amateurs of the law, here is an 18thC anomaly that might have been useful on the Downs. At that date, as every schoolboy knows, you could be hanged for sheep stealing; however, if you happened to be deaf and dumb, you could steal sheep with impunity. Why? You could neither hear the charge nor plead. The Law and Order enthusiast who compiled the Newgate Calendar was quite indignant. (Of course if you were suspected of faking, you were taken down the cellar and pressed to death, so it was a risky defence)

Peter Gould

Contributions to the Spring Newsletter by 14th April please

Mud-free photos, sketches, cartoons would be appreciated
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