

# FRIENDS OF THE RIDGEWAY



Autumn

2008

## NEWSLETTER

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### RITCHIE'S RAMBLINGS

In the past few weeks my ramblings have taken me on the Dorset Coastal path and to Brownsea Island. They have taken me to the Lake District and they have taken me on the first few miles of our proposed Great Stones Way extension of The Ridgeway National Trail.

All were special in their own ways. The coastal path has dramatic sea views and was teeming with sea birds wheeling off the cliffs. On Brownsea Island Susan and I watched entranced as a red squirrel sat a few feet away, eating a

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

nut held in its paws, just like an illustration in a children's book. We also had a rare sighting of other wild life – Bill Oddie and Kate Humble filming for the Autumn Watch TV programme!

In The Lakes I met up with my (very) long standing walking companions and had a few tough days. We ascended Skiddaw; did a hard walk from Grasmere around Easdale Tarn, over the wonderfully named Sergeant Man and back by Helm Crag; and we had an awful, wet day in Borrowdale with a draining climb out of Langstrath, returning by Seatoller to Rosthwaite.

On the Great Stones Way, I was on my own on a superb day in early October. I set off from the car park at Overton Hill, heading south past the uninspiring site of The Sanctuary. Why can't English Heritage make more of this important historical feature? Initially the path reminded me of The Ridgeway National Trail of old – very attractive scenery but the walking spoiled by the deep ruts from off-road vehicles. After the village of East Kennet things took a turn for the better, up a steady climb on a wide byway with great open views. I was serenaded by skylarks and I disturbed a pair of grey partridge.

The approach to the Wansdyke is heavily wooded and was severely damaged by the off-roaders. What a great shame, as this could be a superb walk up to and then through the huge earth works of the ancient fortification. After the Wansdyke, there is a gorgeous stretch of classic downland walking. Springy grass under foot, wonderful panoramic views and sightings of a kestrel, a pair of buzzards, corn buntings and a small flock of golden plover performing precision team aerobatics.

I turned back at the village of Alton Barnes, as I had to retrieve my car from Overton Hill. I varied my route back by following the White Horse Trail across Milk Hill and over Harestone Down, where I saw three deer bounding across. Although this was a very short section of our proposed Great Stones Way, I came home very excited about our new venture. Although very different to the Dorset Coastal path and The Lakes, I believe we are creating a route that will hold its own in this distinguished company. Now to explore the next section!

## NEW FRIENDLY IMAGE

Well, here we are, back in our familiar, old friendly format of The Newsletter, after our 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary issue as the all-dancing, all-singing, full-colour, A4 venture in the guise of The Ridgeway Friend! How was it for you? We very much hope that you enjoyed it. Several of you were so kind as to write to tell us that they did, some asked for extra copies for their friends, and some even sent us some very welcome donations to show their appreciation. That is really very kind of you all, and it makes very well worth while the not inconsiderable work that went into its production, alongside the extra costs.

How much did it cost in fact? Well, the accounts for the year will reveal the horrid truth, but the figures put before the Committee show a total of £1,845 compared to a normal Newsletter issue cost of about £400. So it certainly cost a lot more, but the Committee felt that the extra cost was justified. First and foremost it was a little “thank you” to our members for all their support over the 25 years, and a celebration of what the Association has achieved in that time. But it was also an opportunity to raise our profile and appeal to a wider public. We printed double our usual 500 print run, so have 500 copies to distribute more widely, and are in the process of sending these out to a range of organisations and community centres along the length of the Trail. They have been well received, and some recipients have already asked for more copies, as those we sent out have already been snapped up. One centre asked for another 100 copies, but I’m afraid we couldn’t spare so many for one outlet!

Naturally, we hope that some of our new readers will want to join us as members, with a view to supporting the new initiatives outlined in the article on “The Way Forward”, as well as the on-going preservation of the Trail that remains our first priority. An increase in membership, as well as of donation and subscription income, must of course be a crucial test of the success or otherwise of The Ridgeway Friend. We shall be able to assess this over the coming months. That judgement will go far to determine whether we are able to repeat the exercise. The Committee would like to do so if we can, as we all feel that the larger format is not just more enjoyable to read but has greater impact and could be a valuable tool in helping us spread the message to a wider audience.

We would like to focus any future issues on specific topics, to ensure that each issue has something to say of current importance; and such issues may be

irregular in timing, appearing as they are needed (and can be afforded!) rather than annually. We do not intend to ask you for any increase in the subscription for this purpose, as we're not in the business of selling magazines! But it is certainly part of our purpose to use the most effective means to raise awareness of The Ridgeway, and we are inclined to think that publications like this may fit the bill. It would be most helpful to hear whether or not you agree with us. Please do get in touch!

Jeff Goddard

*As the hempen homespinner of your familiar Newsletter, who had nothing to do with Ridgeway Friend. I hope I was the first to say that this glamorous publication was a credit to the society. Other members have spontaneously made their pleasure known and over £400 has been received in donations*

PG

"The 25th anniversary edition of the FOTR magazine is a delight, readable and informative, a pleasure to receive and enjoy so thanks to everyone involved."

"Thank you for the beautiful 25th anniversary edition of the Journal."

"Congratulations on the 25th anniversary Journal!"

"I really enjoyed the Anniversary issue of the magazine"

"Thanks to the Editor for a lovely, informative 25th Anniversary Edition of your Journal"

"Congratulations - splendid edition."

"Very impressive!"

"Well done FOTR committee ..."

"Many thanks for the well produced 25th anniversary edition of The Ridgeway Friend. I enclose a donation ....."

"The arrival of the excellent 25th Anniversary Edition of the Ridgeway Friend reminded me that I may owe my membership fee ....."

**THE VALE AND RIDGEWAY PROJECT:  
EXCAVATIONS AT MARCHAM/FRILFORD 2008**

2008 is the eighth year of excavation on the site by students of the University of Oxford School of Archaeology under its Director, Dr Gary Lock. The five-week exercise, which takes place each July, was severely hampered in 2007 by the floods in Oxfordshire.

Earlier excavations had revealed a Romano-British temple with underlying Iron Age structures. The current series of excavations has uncovered the tenemos, the sacred area outside the temple; an arena 40 metres in diameter, first seen in an aerial photograph taken in 1976; and a large cruciform-shaped building in which numerous coins were found some with the Greek Chi-rho Christian symbol on them.

The site is now recognised as an important rural religious complex, retaining a religious continuity from the Iron Age until the site was closed at the end of the 4<sup>th</sup> century AD.

We were privileged to have Dr Gary Lock show a group of 16 Friends round the trenches opened this season, starting in the garden of the former Noah's Ark where excavations last took place in the 1930's. These have revealed a ditched enclosure dug into the bedrock which contained pits used for storing seed and grain and where pottery dating from the 3<sup>rd</sup> to 4<sup>th</sup> century BC has been found.

Excavation has continued on a large pit in a building in the tenemos. It was found to contain the bones of thousands of animals, presumably sacrificial offerings, and also quantities of oyster shells which have been analysed as coming from the south coast of England.

In the area between the tenemos and the arena, Trench 36 contains a small square stone-built Roman shrine with a deep tubular hole in the centre, packed with stone, in which over 100 Roman coins have been found. Two large Iron Age pits on the same alignment as the path leading from the tenemos to the arena, contain Iron Age material at the bottom and Roman material on top. The Roman shrine seems to have been deliberately aligned on the Iron Age

pits which suggests that the layout of the Roman religious complex may have been based on earlier alignments

An exciting discovery in the same trench was that of an Iron Age human burial. A teen-aged body was discovered in a pit pushed in on its back with its limbs upwards. Animal skulls had been placed around it, indicating a ceremonial burial.

Finally to the arena, now named as the Semi-Amphitheatre, which has been the subject of speculation as to its function. It was enclosed by a wall with an entrance to the west originally plastered pink. Banks, usually for spectators, surrounded the wall but did not completely encircle it. There was a “royal box” inside the arena to the south and a platform to the north. In the centre, where the water table is high and ground soft, there was a masonry drain going under the walls towards the River Ock.

This arena is quite different to amphitheatres for spectator sports, which all existed in towns. The association with a temple leads Dr Lock to consider that this was a theatre for religious activities, such as plays and recitals. Outside the arena, numerous small stone shrines with quantities of artefacts, from simple finger rings to exquisite enamelled brooches, are evidence that personal worship was also conducted here. In the soft, often waterlogged, ground a painted wooden stake was found. Waterbeds were considered sacred in the Iron Age, an idea taken over by the Romans. There could have been a water shrine here, another indication of religious continuity.

Anna Hanslip

## **WTHE GREAT STONE WAY**

Readers may recall the article that appeared in our Winter issue earlier this year, outlining the concept of an extension to The Ridgeway southwards to Stonehenge and Salisbury, with the proposed name The Great Stones Way. This idea has been more widely disseminated since then, and has been accepted by the Committee as a worth-while project for the Association. We believe that the new path would be both beneficial for the present Ridgeway

National Trail, and consistent with our original vision of preserving and promoting the ancient Ridgeway track from No

We would of course love to see The Ridgeway National Trail extended as originally planned, but we doubt that this is a feasible target in the present economic climate. In the meantime, our efforts are focussed on the adoption of the route from Overton and Avebury, along the flank of Salisbury Plain and its ranges, past Durrington Walls and Stonehenge to Old Sarum and Salisbury, as a new, way-marked, greenway path, The Great Stones Way. The main problem has been for many years that of opening up a safe route across Defence Estates land on Salisbury Plain. We are pleased to see that progress is being made on this, with the Wiltshire and Swindon Local Access Forum and Wiltshire Rights of Way Department taking the lead in negotiation of a scheme of dedications. The route through the Stonehenge World Heritage Site and suitable arrangements for crossing the A303 may also be expected to cause problems. The Committee has set up a working group to liaise with Wiltshire County Council and other interested organisations, in particular the communities along the route, in a bid to initiate a partnership for the development and future maintenance of the path.

In a complementary development, we would like to see another way-marked route across Cranborne Chase, linking the Great Stones Way to the Wessex Ridgeway at Win Green on the Dorset border. The wonderful circular route that this would create, entirely within Wiltshire, linking many of its great monuments, with a natural start and finishing point for visitors in the Cathedral city of Salisbury, must surely have great appeal to active tourists as well as to local walkers.

Whether or not the new path goes ahead, we are keen to see the emergence of a local members' group for Kennet and Avon, and we see an important role for such a group in helping to sponsor The Great Stones Way, and to mobilise public opinion in its favour. We shall be very glad to hear from any members who would be interested to join such a group, and to help support its activities. In the meantime, our valiant Chairman is undertaking to reconnoitre the route, and will no doubt be reporting back in due course; watch out for his despatches from the field in future issues!

## **WALKING THE NORTH WESSEX DOWNS THROUGH ART, HISTORY AND LITERATURE**

I have been given a copy of a wonderful little book and I am recommending it to you! Published by the Wiltshire Archaeological and Natural History Society, it details four walks on the North Wessex Downs. The walks are all around 5 miles in length and there are very clear maps and guide notes. Knowing two of the walks very well myself I can testify that the notes are excellent. Two of the walks take in sections of The Ridgeway.

The different angle the book takes is to select four items from the Wiltshire Heritage Museum in Devizes and base each walk around one of them. For example the walk around Liddington Hill centres on a first edition of the book 'The Story of My Heart' by Richard Jefferies. There are notes on the author, dear to lovers of The Ridgeway, and Liddington Hill, which was special place for him.

The quality of the printing and reproduction of the illustrations, which include paintings by David Inshaw, Jean Muir, David Imms and Nick Amey, is first class. Running to 24 pages, the pleasant surprise is that the cost is only £1 per copy! We're not sure where this little gem is on sale over the counter (Devizes Museum at a guess) , but the ISBN is 978-0-947723-13-2

Highly recommended!

Ian Ritchie

### **VISIT TO BARBURY CASTLE STABLES**



It was a fine but chilly day for the visit to Alan King's racehorse stables at Barbury Castle. The stables are in the middle of wide open countryside at the foot of Barbury Castle, a short way along from The Ridgeway Path.

Alan King himself and his Head Lad showed us round and explained what they do and how they look after and train their talented charges. We accompanied Alan to a training session, standing with him in the middle of a large paddock while 30 or so energetic horses circled around us! The training programme for each horse is different, dependant on their current fitness and ability, and Alan carefully watches each one and gives instructions to their jockeys. Each horse does about 1½ hours of work a day, and it takes about 3 months to achieve racing fitness at the start of the season. After the paddock work, they went off to the gallops and we went off to look round the stables.

The Head Lad took us round the stables, introducing us to the horses and telling us a bit about them. We visited the tack room and the feed room, where a large wall chart lists each horse and the food it eats. Some horses are apparently very fussy, so have to be tempted to eat with special supplements. They have 3 feeds a day. Outside the stables some of the horses were relaxing in paddocks, which was where we met Katchit (the champion hurdler), a surprisingly small but very handsome horse.

Alan trains about 160 horses at Barbury, and he has more stabled in yards nearby waiting for room to move in. Almost all are jumpers. Many of the horses come from France, as purchasers looked over there when horses from Ireland became too expensive.



Everyone enjoyed the visit, but left not much wiser on how to pick a winner!

Janet Hierons

## **RIDGEWAY TRAIL A THREAT TO AVEBURY WHS?**

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.

## **RIDGEWAY SCENES POSTCARDS**



Two designs in full colour, reproduced from paintings by Gus Mills.

Sold in packs of 6 cards with envelopes, 3 cards of each design.

## **‘DOWNLAND PATHS’ GREETINGS CARDS**



Reproduced in full colour from a pastel by Susan Kirkman.

Sold in packs of 5 cards with envelopes.

### **DATES FOR THE DIARY**

AGM 2009 Court Hill 22 March

Wednesday 23 July 2009 at 11.00 The Annual Visit to Marcham  
Excavations courtesy of Dr Gary Lock

Furthermore Jane Ebbut invites FoR members to another joint excursion:  
details in next Newsletter

