

# FRIENDS OF THE RIDGEWAY



Summer

2009

## NEWSLETTER

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### RITCHIE'S RAMBLINGS

From time to time my Ramblings take me far from The Ridgeway, both geographically and philosophically. Since the last Newsletter I have walked in the Quantocks in Somerset and in the Brecon Beacons and have enjoyed both experiences enormously. However it is on a broader philosophic issue that I reflect here – coastal access. And once again I am in real danger of upsetting a large number of you.

We currently have public access to about two thirds of our wonderful coastline in the UK. I walked a small piece of it when in Somerset, seeing the amazing rock formations on Kilve beach and climbing up to Quantock's Head. Within the past year I have enjoyed the wide open beaches of Northumberland and the

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

cliff path around the Isle of Purbeck. Later this year I will go to Pembrokeshire to explore an area new to me. As a keen walker I have never felt deprived of my rights to access the varied parts of our coastline. I wonder, therefore, at the wisdom of the Government pursuing its aim to open up the whole of our coastline as part of the Marine and Coastal Access Bill.

The cost of achieving the aim will be enormous, involving expensive and lengthy legal cases with landowners to establish public rights of way. The new fencing, signposts and stiles required will be a huge bill that will fall on the local authorities concerned. To encourage people to enjoy their new rights will involve publicity campaigns and informational websites. A lot of the coast currently closed to the public is very remote, with limited or non-existent access by public transport or motor vehicle. So for whose benefit is this money being spent? If you ask the question 'Are you in favour of public access to the whole of our coastline?' then almost everyone would say yes. However, if you ask the question 'Which bit of the coastline will you now visit that you were unable to before?' I doubt that one in a thousand people would have an answer. At a time when local authorities do not have the money to invest in National Trails such as The Ridgeway and when most of our rights of way network is in a poor state and needs money spent on it, I believe the Government should take the decision to postpone this piece of legislation.

I will put my flak jacket on and await your comments!

On a very different tack, our good friends at GLEAM have revised their website and I commend you to have a look at it. GLEAM (the Green Lanes Environmental Action Movement) was very supportive of our campaign to eliminate off-road motor vehicles from The Ridgeway and they took a key role in bringing about the legislative changes that resulted in the new Restricted Byway right of way category. They continue to fight for local communities where off-roaders threaten the peaceful enjoyment of walkers, cyclists and horse riders on local rights of way. If you are able to, take a look at [www.gleam-uk.org](http://www.gleam-uk.org)

Finally, if you suffer restricted mobility but want to enjoy getting out into the countryside, you should investigate the Disabled Ramblers organisation. They organise rambles for people using wheelchairs (manual and powered) and electric scooters. Their promotional brochure includes a shot of a group enjoying a trip out on The Ridgeway. Their website is at [www.disabledramblers.co.uk](http://www.disabledramblers.co.uk) If you don't have access to the internet call me on 01672 520090 and I will send you the details.

## THE GREAT STONES WAY

You may have been surprised that there was only a passing mention in our last Newsletter of the Great Stones Way project that has been absorbing a lot of your Committee's time in recent months, and that your Chairman was busy walking last autumn. I'm pleased to report that this does not mean that no progress has been made!

The most significant step forward was your agreement at the AGM on 15th March, reported in the last Newsletter, to adopt a new, wider Objects Clause, enabling us to raise our sights to the inspiring prospect of a coast-to-coast Ridgeway path, and to do what we can to encourage development towards that objective. We have focussed on the Great Stones way as the first step in that direction.

Following the AGM, your Committee initiated talks with the Wiltshire authorities, with the Avebury and Stonehenge World Heritage Site management, and with some advisers on tourism and development. While it would be possible to designate and way-mark a cross-country path quite cheaply, it would clearly be inappropriate not to maintain so far as possible, for extensions to The Ridgeway, the National Trails standards of decent signage and proper access for all. It is clear that the development and promotion of an all-year trail to these standards is quite an expensive operation. However, the likely economic benefits for local communities of such a trail, in the form of earnings from new visitors by local providers of accommodation and refreshment, are also substantial. The trail would also help to get some visitors to Wiltshire's great monuments out of their cars and off our congested roads!

For all these reasons, the authorities are in principle supportive of our project; but to get practical backing is another thing entirely! For any public agency to undertake the work itself is out of the question in present circumstances! There are, however, even in these straitened days, sources of funds available, and Ian Ritchie's Ramblings in the last Newsletter described one of these sources, the LEADER grant scheme launched for the North Wessex Downs area in June. For any grant application to be successful, however, it is necessary to accurately calculate costs and demonstrate economic benefit. This requires expertise in the form of a feasibility study by qualified consultants. Fortunately, grants can be obtained for these costs also, although some contribution by the promoters is usually required.

Encouraged by the positive response given to our consultations, the working group set up by your Committee has drafted terms of reference for a feasibility study, and is seeking offers for the work from suitable consultants. We have also applied for, and been awarded, a grant of £5,000 for this purpose by the North Wessex Downs AONB, from their Sustainable Development Fund, for which we are most grateful. Further grant funding will be needed, and is currently being sought, but we are hopeful of being able to commission an expert feasibility study for the project before this coming winter. A positive outcome to the study would enable us to apply with some confidence for the LEADER or other grant funding needed, and hopefully to involve other partners, to complete and launch the Great Stones Way to the professional standards that we believe our members would expect.

Whatever grants are obtained, there will be a need for public support for the new trail, both financial and through individual time and effort as volunteers. We envisage mobilising that support by way of a public campaign and appeal, and we do of course hope that our members will want to do their bit too! All contributions will be gratefully received! Watch this space for further news.

Jeff Goddard

### **WAYLAND YOUNG, 2ND BARON KENNET**

We were sad to hear of the death of Wayland Young, Lord Kennet, who passed away on 7th May, 2009, at the age of 85, just too late for us to record in our last Newsletter.

Other obituaries have well covered the political and literary achievements of Lord Kennet's multi-faceted and civilised life. For us, his life-long concerns for conservation and for the Wiltshire countryside were of greater importance. At various times he served, amongst many other posts, as Chairman of the Council for the Preservation of Rural England, of the Avebury Society, of the Stonehenge Alliance, and patron of Action for the River Kennet. While his home remained in the Bayswater Road, he loved to retreat to his cottage in Lockeridge Dene, close to Overton Hill, and he was a strong supporter of our campaign for the protection of The Ridgeway from the off-rovers, and, more recently, of our Great Stones Way project.

We mourn the loss of a great supporter and friend, and commiserate with Lady Kennet and with the rest of his family.

JG

## THE RIDGEWAY

*There is a favourite place where I escape sometimes.  
This ancient green road runs towards the west  
From Chilterns to Berkshire Downs to Wiltshire green  
(But never in the other direction!)  
Here I can find peace and joy and beauty  
In solitude and quiet, never loneliness,  
And lift my spirit up to higher spheres.  
All I can hear are breezes through the trees.  
Great clumps of beech that stand aloof and dark.  
A skylark rises over cornfields, song aloft,  
Hovering above a nest so well concealed,  
That I must tread more carefully than usual/  
Here and there a glimpse of deer or hare  
Show perfect harmony of form and colour.  
Only a distant fleeting train that snakes  
Through chequered fields below, returns one's mind  
To reality of on-going living and the daily grind.  
To the far west, the glorious comforting Cotswolds:  
To north, blue misty views of Oxford's Shotover.  
Sometimes I meet an earnest, back-packed man  
With muddy. Well-worn boots and sturdy stick,  
Exchange of nods and cheery morning smiles  
Sufficient – humans are irrelevant up here!  
The early drovers with their woolly flocks  
Were first to use this ancient English road,  
Now rutted, full of rain in winter, mud in spring,  
And fringed with narrow strips of splashed, worn grass,  
While further back, long copses where the pheasants hide,  
and wild things undisturbed get on with life*

Joan Carter

To whom the Editor owes an apology for printing this poem years after it was offered

## MARCHAM VISIT, AND VWH LOCAL GROUP WALK

**The Marcham Excavations:** A wide, grassy field, carpeted with wild flowers, stretches down to the line of trees marking the River Ock, just off the A338 north of Wantage. The field is scattered with grassy piles of spoil and patches of orange netting around the various sites where earnest students and volunteers squat beside the neat, marked strips of earth, labouring with trowel and brush to uncover the ancient remains. Prof Gary Lock presides over a sand-table model of the site, with the Roman temple and its *temenos*, or sacred enclosure, and other shrines and workshops within the complex, shown by small scale models. A group of 16 Friends of The Ridgeway members cluster round, keeping a weather eye on the clouds. The Oxford School of Archaeology is conducting its annual, 5-week excavations at Marcham in the Vale of White Horse, the current phase of its Vale and Ridgeway Project, following on from the Segsbury Camp digs.



Oxford's interest in the site dates back many years. Nearby Roman and Saxon cemeteries were first excavated in the C19; and in the 1930s, the Roman temple and rotunda, and earlier Bronze and Iron Age remains, later

designated as an Ancient Monument, were uncovered in the garden of the Noah's Ark Inn. The more recent cycle of excavation follows the discovery of a semi-amphitheatre in Trendles Field on Manor Farm, after a crop-spraying over-flight revealed a darker circle of green. A geo-physical survey indicated a wealth of features in the field, identified as a large, religious complex associated with the temple. The current excavations, started in 2001, aim to learn more about the history and purposes of the site, and to shed light on the long history of the complex, now thought to span 2,000 years! One puzzle is whether the Roman complex was intentionally built over an earlier Iron Age religious site, to provide continuity of worship, or was placed there



co-incidentally. The Roman pantheon may well have accommodated features of Iron Age animistic beliefs, and established shrines to the water and earth deities of the ancient Britons.

We followed Prof Lock around the site,

watching fascinated as he pointed out the significance of the stones and hollows emerging from the earth, and the deductions and speculations built upon them, bringing the site to life. It is not surprising that our annual visits, so efficiently organised by Anna Hanslip, to the Marcham excavations, and Gary Lock's explanations of them, have proved so popular.

**The VWH Local Group Walk:** The VWHLG Committee had very sensibly organised a guided walk to The Ridgeway, to follow the Marcham visit, and several local members had signed up for it. We gathered in the excellent café at Smith's Stores in Ardington for a good value light lunch, then were joined in the adjacent village car-park by Tom Loyd, of the Lockinge Estate and a VWHLG Committee member, who briefed us on the background of the estate and its impact on the landscape we were about to traverse. Accumulated over 40 years in the C19, the estate, with its workaday hub at Ardington, and residential areas in Lockinge, was built up by the family of Baron Wantage, the Crimean hero and VC, whose monument on The Ridgeway still presides over the Vale. The Loyd family, now in their third generation as owners of the estate, take care to ensure the continuity of village life in a changing economic environment. Today, many of the old agricultural buildings are converted for use by technology companies, bringing new life to Ardington,

**The Friends of the Ridgeway Local Group are planning a walk on 11th October via Bishopstone - Ashbury - Woolstone .**

**Please contact Joyce Gardner on 01367 710743 in October to discover the details & to book for the walk.**

while the land and pasture continues to be used for efficient agricultural enterprise.

Leaving Ardington by way of the path around stately Ardington House, now owned by the Baring family, Roger Griffin led us out into open country past Roundabout Hill, and down to Ginge Brook. We followed this up the hill to Ginge, where we admired Maximus, the well-known chameleon statue, perched on its gate. Thereafter a testing pull up the hill past Grims Ditch led us out, with a cooling wind in our faces, onto The Ridgeway and its glorious views over the Vale. Soon turning down past Lady Betjeman's memorial stone, we followed the winding track down to Coldharbour, and past Betterton House into East Lockinge. Here we turned off past the pretty church in its field surroundings, and took the footpath past the pools of Lockinge Brook back into Ardington and our waiting cars. Many thanks to VWHLG for an excellent walk, and to Roger Griffin for leading it.

## **High Summer for Ridgewayfriends.org.uk**

The summer refresher of the web-site is now up and running, after a short delay, and all members, and others, are invited to visit, and hopefully to derive some inspiration for the current high summer walking season – once the weather improves, that is!

It will soon be time to start drafting the new pages for Autumn, and once again we ask you for your pub walk recommendations. A small prize will be offered for the successful candidate! Also any more photos, stories, poems (!) or observations will be very welcome. After all, the web-site is as good as its contributors!

### **Contributions to the Autumn Newsletter by 3rd October 2009 please**

The editor prefers email text and can only process electronic images  
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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