

FRIENDS OF THE RIDGEWAY



Autumn

2009

NEWSLETTER

RITCHIES RAMBLINGS

It wasn't the best day to be up at Barbury Castle. There was a fine and persistent drizzle and visibility was limited. The usual wide views over Wroughton and Swindon were missing and Professor Gary Lock was having to appeal to our imaginations to envisage why the site was chosen by iron age man. He gestured in the direction of Liddington Castle, lost in the grey mist, and towards Uffington, even further away in the gloom. We walked around the top of the perimeter mound, carefully watching our steps, and then

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Website: www.ridgewayfriends.org.uk

down by the western entry gate into the central arena. He had handed out copies of a geophysical survey of the site but by this time mine was a soggy mess. But even on a day like this, there was so much to enjoy.

I was leading a party of about twenty people who were attending the North Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Forum. Held each year, the Forum brings together some hundred or so individuals who are involved in the AONB. They represent all interests – farmers, foresters, walkers, local councils, the CPRE, Natural England, conservation groups and land agents. They have one prime thing in common. They all share a love for the landscape of the North Wessex Downs and wish to see it preserved, protected and enhanced. This year the theme of the Forum centred on the opportunities for economic development, emphasising the point that even protected landscapes such as the NWD must have a sound economic base if they are to survive and thrive. The main presentation in the morning was by Alun Williams, the head of Visit Wiltshire, the official tourism partnership for the county. Alun based his presentation around the consultancy report he had commissioned, looking at the visitor potential of The Ridgeway. Perhaps unsurprisingly to members of our Society, the report concludes that there is a significant opportunity to attract much larger numbers of visitors to Wiltshire, based on the attractions of The Ridgeway and the surrounding area. The consultants developed an economic model that suggests for every £1 invested in improving walking routes, providing more accommodation and promoting the area, there would be a return of £2.20. Their recommendations are to invest £1.6 million over the next 10 years, and they are very supportive of the concept of our Great Stones Way as part of this.

The afternoon of the Forum gave those attending the chance to participate in one of a number of field trips, and hence my wet visit to Barbury Castle. Having met Gary Lock a number of times

through his Marsham excavations and on the walk and talk he did for us to Segsbury Camp at our last AGM, I knew that the weather would not dampened his enthusiasm for the iron age hill forts of the Ridgeway. Nor did it. He gave a lively and engaging commentary on what we were seeing and what we would have seen 2000 years ago. And this in spite of the fact that he had just returned from Taiwan the day before! As my party climbed aboard the coach to return for tea and cake back in Marlborough Town Hall, I reflected on how positive they all were about the trip. For most it was their first time to Barbury and The Ridgeway. They all experienced that wonderful sense of history and continuity that you get in this ancient landscape. The North Wessex Downs are very special, and The Ridgeway is such a precious element within the AONB. Both need cherishing and protecting, but both need sensitive economic development as well.

Ian Ritchie

VIRTUAL MELLOW FRUITFULNESS

As autumn draws on, and the days shorten, there is a new seasonal look for the web-site, a new pub-walk around Britwell Salome to try (The Goose is a fine restaurant, with Michelin ambitions, but this is not reflected in their excellent value lunches!), and an exciting list of events planned by the Vale of White Horse Local Group to review. Do visit again



and check us out! But, alas, as the season changes, and the year draws to a close, our long-serving and first web-master, Peter Gould, is bowing out of this task and handing over to a new team. It is planned that, in the fullness of time, a new Communications Secretary will take charge of this increasingly important aspect of our communications with members and the world at large. Until we are able to recruit someone qualified for this role, however, Secretary Jeff Goddard will hold the fort, ably supported, particularly on the technical side, by Sarah Newman. All comments on the web-site and your valued contributions, please, to Jeff at Ridgewayfriends@aol.com. Our warmest thanks and appreciation go to Peter for all his hard work and dedication in setting up the web-site originally, in contributing the greater part of its content (and all the amusing, recherche and quirky bits!), and keeping the show on the road for so long! Please bear with the new team if they lack the skills and experience of the Old Master!

Jeff Goddard

EDITORIAL DEMISE

Giving up as Secretary a few years ago, I agreed to continue as Webmaster and Newsletter Editor for a while, so my successor could concentrate on being secretarial, unencumbered by the other tasks. (By the way, the old website was not All My Own Work. Its creation owed a lot to Brian Twigger and its maintenance to Janet Hierons. Yes, I did write the nonsense.)

Since then the Website has been impressively redesigned and I have had little to do with it. Now, it seems time to pass the Newsletter on also, since I am, so to say, an old dog doing old tricks. There is no special urgency; I'm definitely surrendering my rubber bone in 2011, but would willingly give it up to a frisky puppy at the 2010 AGM *. (For details about the task, please email the usual address.)

Peter Gould

** Shame to spoil a good image, but I'm an ailurophile. Catnip mouse anybody?*

BOOKS

FOOTSTEPS 2

2 Footsteps2 by Chris Cole

Published by The Hobnob Press Price £8.95

ISBN 978-0-946418-80-0

Whilst working on our Great Stones Way project I met Chris Cole for a chat and a bite to eat at the Barge Inn at Honeystreet. Chris has been involved in developing the Pewsey Avon Trail, a new walking route that is likely to coincide with our Great Stones Way along the Avon valley. It seemed a good idea to meet and share views, and it was.

Over the course of my ploughman's lunch, I found that Chris writes regular walking articles for Wiltshire Life. He also contributed to a very well received book of walks in south Wiltshire under the title Footsteps. Chris has followed this up by writing a sequel, Footsteps 2, with walks in north-east Wiltshire. This is Ridgeway territory!

The sub-title of the book is 'The Cream of Walks in North-East Wiltshire' and from my knowledge of many of the walks he describes, I think the sub-title is spot on. Twenty walks are covered in detail. The walks are mostly between 5 and 7 miles long. The text is clear and so are the directions. This is not unusual in a good walking book, but what is not common is the amount of information that Chris gives about the surrounding countryside, its history and its wildlife. I soon found myself reading about railways, canals, Charles Dickens, the old Bath road, ghosts, hares, Honda's factory, moonrakers, Ian Fleming and much, much more. The book is a good read, even if you never put your boots on!

At least six of the walks include sections of The Ridgeway and jolly good walks they are too. Do I have any reservations? Well, only that the sketch map for each walk is rudimentary. The author acknowledges that Ordnance Survey maps are essential if you are

not already very familiar with the route but, even when I was, I found the sketch maps not very useful.

With that small reservation, I recommend this book to members looking for a collection of good walks on and around the western end of the National Trail.

Ian Ritchie

Skyhorse

Reminded by Joan Carter's poem, David Fielding wanted to draw attention to Jon Stallworthy's *Skyhorse*, 11 poems entirely devoted to the White Horse at Uffington (32pp) published by the Thumbscrew Press for £4 in 2002.

<http://www.bristol.ac.uk/thumbscrew>

Address PO Box 657, Oxford OX2 6PH

They are very fine, evoking from early to recent times the moods and responses to this enigmatic and atmospheric hill figure. I can certainly recommend it but tastes in poetry are rather like senses of humour...one man's meat etc

David Fielding

A WALK AROUND AVEBURY

Sunday, 25th April, 2010

The pre-historic landscape of the Avebury World Heritage Site offers a wealth of interest to the walker. Committee Member Jim Gunter has arranged to lead a walk around the major monuments, on Sunday, 25th April, 2010, with expert input from FoR member Matilda Webb, the Assistant Curator of the Keiler Museum Avebury. Matilda is a very experienced archaeologist, having worked in Rome, Sicily, Crete, and Mongolia, plus a long time in Orkney on many of the neolithic monuments up there, before coming to Avebury. She is also the author of a book on Early Christian Rome (*The Churches and Catacombs of Early Christian*

Rome) as well as a history of Henley-on-Thames and a totally unrelated children's novel (*The Ship's Kitten*).

The plan is to include Silbury Hill, West Kennet long barrow, the Sanctuary, up The Ridgeway to Green St (the Herepath), West Kennet Avenue and back to the Avebury Henge. For those with browsers, Jim has done a neat bit of mapping at <http://www.gmap-pedometer.com/?r=3263283>. The walk is some 11.5km (6.9 miles), taking some 4 hours, but a longer option would be available to anyone interested.

Details will be confirmed later, but timing is likely to be to depart the NT car-park (parking free to NT and English Heritage members) at 1030 am. Late arrivals could park and join the walk at Silbury Hill. Bring a packed lunch and look forward to a high tea at the NT restaurant on return.

TTHE GREAT STONES WAY

As reported in the Summer Newsletter, having received widespread support from members and from the various authorities concerned, the Committee decided to press ahead with plans for development of a Great Stones Way path, as a southwards extension to Salisbury via Stonehenge of The Ridgeway National Trail, to a similar standard of signage, surface and access. To this end, and in order to be able to raise the necessary funding, we first need a professional feasibility study, demonstrating the economic benefits of the project. At the time of the last Newsletter, we were in the throes of identifying possible consultants for this purpose, and had gratefully received approval in principle from the North Wessex Downs AONB for a £5,000 grant from their Sustainable Development Fund towards the cost of the study.

Work has continued over the summer on progressing the plans. We have applied to Plain Action, a Local Access Group administering LEADER funding for the Salisbury Plain area, for a £5,000 grant to



match that promised by NWDAONB, and have been encouraged to believe that this will be forthcoming. Further financial support and encouragement was also offered by Wiltshire Council's Rights of Way Dept, who will make a

grant of £1,000, and by VisitWiltshire, who have offered bridging finance of up to £2,000 if needed. This support will cover the greater part of the costs, but we shall nevertheless have to commit some of our reserves to the project.

Three suitably qualified firms of consultants submitted firm bids for the study, and a working group of the Committee are recommending for selection for the work a consortium of professionals with the necessary skills in countryside access, some of whose names will be familiar to many members.. At the time of writing, we are in final discussions with this consortium over detailed arrangements for the study and its necessary components, and ensuring that the study and the different sources of finance are properly matched. We are hopeful that we shall be able to commission the feasibility study for the project very soon, before the winter sets in, enabling us to start talks with donors for implementation of the project during the course of next year.

Finally, and most importantly, we are starting to lay plans for the fund-raising effort that will be needed to scrape together the project finance to complement the grants and public support that we are hoping for, so that The Great Stones Way can become a reality. More of this next time!

Jeff Goddard

THE GREAT ACCESS DEBATE

First Rex Hepburn pro Coastal Access

In the Summer edition of the Newsletter *Ian questioned* the need for the proposals in the Marine and Coastal Access Bill for extending the right of access to the English coast. A recently published audit of existing paths by Natural England found that over a third of the country's coastline is either inaccessible or lacks any secure access with parts of the North West being the worst. But even the South West – whose coastal path is held up as the blue print for the national version – was found lacking to good access to nearly a quarter of its shores. So there are indeed parts of the coast that cannot presently be walked.

Natural England's budget of £50, over 10 years will deliver not only a continuous path around the coastline but a margin of land including access to beaches, dunes, cliffs and headland wherever appropriate. So the intention behind this goes further than just simply opening up a narrow path. Once the Bill becomes law later this year – I think it is almost certain to go through as the proposals do have general support from all political parties – work can start to make the whole coast open. I understand that the coastal path will build upon existing public access under the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949 and the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 and there will be a detailed consultation process that will involve all local interests. But the coastal path will not be a new public right of way involving the lengthy negotiations that are a mark of paths established under the highways legislation. The cost of any new fencing, stile, bridges and signposts on the path will be paid for by Natural England so these costs will not fall on local authorities.

I think we should support these proposals as this Bill will open up parts of the country, they should contribute to making people more active and healthy, and should help support vital services like shops and pubs.

Next David Fielding con

I thoroughly agree with our Chairman's views in the Summer newsletter; as far as I am concerned he can take his flak jacket off!

If only the projected cost of this "initiative" could be put into the budget to maintain and improve our long distance footpaths we would benefit hugely. I felt much the same way about open access land where the cash-strapped local authorities could have done with the money to augment their underfunded (certainly in Oxfordshire), footpaths office to achieve the sorely needed more effective and rapid inspections of footpaths over farmland where far too many farmers are just ignoring the law.

Peter Gould pro - doubtless the debate will continue

Living closer to some inaccessible coast than I do to the Ridgeway, I should love it to be opened up. Shortage of cash will always be an argument against improvement; a hundred years on, the improvement abides and the accountancy bothers no one. One of my favourite authors, Thomas Love Peacock, opposed to "the agrestic kakistocracy", was campaigning for footpaths and access nearly two hundred years ago: if only they'd lavished a few hundred guineas and a couple of groats then. (Of course, the banks were collapsing and there was a major war to pay for.)

TWO HOLIDAYS

One explores **Norfolk** (Sunday May 9th – Friday May 14th) Cost £490 (Coach, five nights dinner, B&B at Maids Head Hotel, Norwich, gratuities and entrance to non NT properties like Sandringham)

The other the **Med** Barcelona – Adriatic – Pireus (Sept 2nd – 16th) Cost subject to confirmation but currently ranging from £2820 (twin inside cabin) to £4444 (single outside cabin)

Brochure 0800 300 432 or www.spiritofadventure.co.uk

Further details about both from Jane Ebbutt, 8 Windmill Close, Aldbourne, Marlborough, SN8 2DN 0167 254 0368

ASAP to join a small group for the cruise.

SAE for the Norfolk trip.

AVEBURY SCENES GREETINGS CARDS

Two designs in full colour, reproduced from paintings by Anna Dillon



"The Guardians"

in bright colours



"The Avenue"

in more subdued colours

Sold in packs of 4 cards of one design with envelopes

@ £5 per pack including postage.

Order Form overleaf

2010 AGM

Sunday 21st March

14:00

Ridgeway Centre Court Hill

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... packs of "The Avenue" cards @ £5 per pack	£
Donation	£
TOTAL	£

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Please send this form together with a cheque made payable to
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to: FOTR Greetings Cards, c/o Janet Hierons, 34 Oxford Street,
Ramsbury, Wilts, SN8 2PS.

**Contributions to the Winter Newsletter by
3rd January 2010 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