

FRIENDS  
OF  
THE RIDGEWAY

Preserving the spirit of The Ridgeway

**NEWSLETTER**

Issue 90

Summer 2011

**Notes from the Editor:**

I will be editing your Newsletter, having taken over from Peter Gould and hope that I make a good job of it. The front cover 'wavy line' is to represent the rolling hills that the Ridgeway follows which will be reproduced in green in some future colour editions. Articles and news will, I hope, be as informative as before, perhaps with more illustration. Feel free to let me know your thoughts.

Ian Ritchie has decided to cease his 'Ramblings' (see below) which were always perceptive yet light-hearted. I know however that he will continue to address the Friends of the Ridgeway on important issues.

I seem to have entered the fray at an exciting time for The Friends of the Ridgeway when campaigns to lengthen the trail across the Vale of Pewsey to Salisbury Plain are materialising. The Great Stones Way will cross beautiful landscapes and encourage us to explore new parts of the countryside. Jeff Goddard, our Secretary gives us important news (page 3) on progress. In July, there was an inspiring walk, led by our intrepid Chairman, and rock concert at Avebury to raise funds for Prospect Hospice. A report follows on page 5. We would like a volunteer to become our new Membership Secretary: please see details on page 7.

There is a wealth of diverse wildlife along the Ridgeway and you are lucky if, in early summer, you catch sight of the small blue butterfly,



described by Janet Hierons. Its dependence on a very specific habitat is fascinating. Janet also reports on the Marcham excavations (page 11).

The Junior Explorers page tells the story of Wayland the Smith (page 13). It has all the elements of a first-rate thriller!

Louise Tinker

### **In Memoriam**

I have rambled far and wide over the past few years but the time has come to stop. Not walking that is, but wittering on in the Newsletter under my Ramblings column. I have enjoyed the freedom that the column gave me to range over topics from Government policy to butterflies, but it is time for a change. I hope that you like the new format of the Newsletter under the editorship of Louise Tinker and no doubt I will be moved to pen the occasional piece from time to time. I leave you with the chorus of a country and western song I love from the time I lived in Texas

Lord, I was born a ramblin' man  
Tryin' to make a living and doing the best I can  
And when it's time for leavin'  
I hope you'll understand  
That I was born a ramblin' man

I have left out the bits about my father being a gambler and me being born on the back seat of a Greyhound bus, rollin' down highway forty one, as they are not accurate.

Ian Ritchie

## **The Great Stones Way Report**

The last report on our Great Stones Way project, in the Spring edition, expressed our growing frustration at the continuing resistance to the project, not just by the communities in the Vale of Pewsey and the Downs, but by Wiltshire Council and other authorities. In particular, we were frustrated by our inability to follow through on the warm welcome given to the plans by the parishes in the Avon Valley, and the offers of funding extended by Plain Action from their LEADER finance, and by the Tidworth Area Board from their Community Area grant funds. However, we recognised the need for all concerned to allay the genuine concerns expressed by residents and landowners, and to make sure that due care is taken to avoid or minimise any adverse environmental effects. We looked again at our proposed route through the Vale, and re-directed it away from the World Heritage Sites, albeit still close to them; and adopted the suggestion that the route should start at Barbury Castle near Swindon, where there is less visitor pressure and more parking than at Avebury. We also agreed to set up a Consultative Group of conservation organisations, and that Environmental Impact studies should be commissioned for the whole route, despite our scepticism as to the real justification for this extra expenditure.

After a long delay, we had a useful meeting with the Council in May, at which various mis-understandings were cleared up, and we were able to press our case for greater support and understanding. Perhaps as a result, the Plain Action contract was at last released, albeit subject to a number of additional conditions, and this enabled us to accept the Tidworth Community grant. Funding is therefore now in place, including a share of all your generous donations, to enable us to complete the southern sections of the route, that we call the “Plain and Avon” walk, between the A342 crossing that marks the North Wessex Downs boundary, across Salisbury Plain and along the Avon Valley to Amesbury. We shall have to commission a “light touch” environmental study for this part of the route, but this can be done in

parallel with preparations for the improvement works. Our doughty Chairman, Ian Ritchie, aided by our “guest expert”, Roger Greasley, is getting stuck in to a series of meetings with the parish Rights of Way officers and landowners along the route, to explain and agree the works needed, and to make preparations for them to be done. The development should hopefully be completed this autumn, enabling us to plan a “Plain and Avon” launch next spring.

In the meantime, there are some signs that people in the Vale and Downs are getting used to the idea of the new route, and we hope to be able to sit down with them at last, in a better atmosphere, to discuss the implications for their communities, positive as well as negative, and to settle the route and any measures needed to mitigate adverse effects, such as pressure on car parks at peak periods. If all goes well, we hope that the extra studies will be completed this autumn, enabling us to renew our funding applications for the northern half of the route, and to start the improvement works in the spring.

Many of you will have seen the excellent article by Hugh Thomson on The Great Stones Way in The Guardian on 14<sup>th</sup> May, which gave rise to a number of enquiries from people wanting to walk the route. There have been a number of other writers also interested in exploring and writing up the route, whom we have been fobbing off. We have no doubt that when we do at last come to launch the project, interest will be all that we could hope for!

Jeff Goddard



## Avebury Rocked

It is some time since your Chairman attended a rock concert but he did on Saturday 9<sup>th</sup> July – and I had a great time!

I was recently part of a team that organised a sponsored walk and the concert to raise funds for the wonderful Prospect Hospice. Prospect is the only provider of dedicated end of life care in the Swindon area and helps over 1500 people each year. The inspiration for the event came from a professional musician, Nick Harper, who lives in Avebury and whose mother died of cancer. In her final days she was very well cared for at the Prospect Hospice, and Nick wanted to acknowledge this in the best way he could. He was the moving force behind **Avebury Rocks!**

My particular role in the team was to organise and lead the 20 mile walk. Initially this was planned to be from the Uffington White Horse along The Ridgeway to Avebury but as the numbers likely to participate grew, the logistics of a linear walk became increasingly difficult and expensive. In the end we decided upon a circular walk from Avebury, across Fyfield Down to Marlborough, and then north on the disused railway track to Ogbourne St George. From there the route picked up The Ridgeway, climbing Smeathe's Ridge to Barbury Castle and then descending to Avebury.





Over 100 brave souls had signed up for the 20 mile walk and we started with a song specially written for the day by Nick, and performed by him in the stone circle. The weather was cloudy as we set off, and it remained so for most of the day. A number of the musicians were walking with us and we made a few stops for impromptu musical interludes along the way! The walk went very well. The temperature was about right and everyone seemed to enjoy the views across the downs followed by the gentle terrain of the old railway track. The long haul up to Barbury Castle meant that the group spread out over quite a distance but this was not a problem as we regrouped at Barbury for lunch and more songs! A further 60 walkers joined us there for the final 6 miles to Avebury, which was not too much of a challenge for them but proved a bit more difficult for those who had already walked 14 miles.

Back at Avebury, the cricket field had been transformed into a concert venue through the hard work of the two local Rotary Clubs (Marlborough and Swindon Thamesdown). The beer tent proved a first port of call for many of the walkers, followed by something from the barbecue.

The concert was great fun. Although I cannot pretend I was familiar with the names and reputations of the performers before the event, they drew an additional 700 people to join the walkers to make a packed and enthusiastic audience. The headline act was Newton Faulkner, a young and charismatic guitarist and a Glastonbury favourite. He brought the day to a close with a brilliant set before we all headed home, tired but happy.



Although we are still pulling the final accounts together, it is clear that we have raised over £20,000 for the Prospect Hospice. I feel very privileged to have been part of the team that achieved this. It was team effort but I would like to pay special thanks to Nick Harper for his original idea and his inspiration and energy as we planned the day during the dark days of winter.

Ian Ritchie

We are looking for a new **MEMBERSHIP SECRETARY** to join the Committee as Janet is stepping down. The role includes keeping the Membership Records up to date, handling subscription renewals, and producing reports for the Treasurer. It takes 1 to 2 hours per week, less in the summer months but more in the winter to deal with renewals. A computer is needed with WORD and EXCEL, access to the internet and use of email as most correspondence between Committee members is

by email. If you are interested in taking over this role or would like to know more, please contact Janet by email  
jandal3-FRmembers@yahoo.co.uk or phone her on 01672  
520333.

## **THE SMALL BLUE BUTTERFLY ON THE RIDGEWAY**

The Small Blue (*Cupido minimus*) is our smallest resident butterfly. It occurs mainly in southern Britain, but it is rare and found only in small populations. Its colour is rather brownish blue and easily overlooked. Along The Ridgeway, it occurs in isolated pockets above Lambourn and further west around Waylands Smithy, Hinton Parva & Barbury Castle (2004 survey figures). The best time to see the butterflies is late afternoon, in small groups probably in long grass.

The Small Blue relies entirely on the Kidney Vetch plant (*Anthyllis vulneraria*) to reproduce. Its larvae live in the flower heads and feed on the anthers and seeds. But Kidney Vetch is particularly fussy about where it will grow. It likes disturbed soil, sheltered and facing south for warmth, dry chalk grassland and scrubby habitats such as road embankments or quarries. To propagate itself, the seedlings need sparse vegetation typically amongst light patchy scrub. Only small-scale pockets of habitat are needed, but lots of them within reach of each other.

The western Ridgeway has much underlying chalk and exposed sections of unimproved grassland, potentially suitable sites for creating habitat. Thus The Friends of The Ridgeway are involved in a project set up by The North Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (NWD AONB) to create these habitats along The Ridgeway. The project is called **THE RIDGEWAY HABITAT ISLANDS PROJECT** and the aim is to encourage the Small Blue to extend its range and population. A

couple of years ago, habitat was created by Sheepdrove Organic Farm as part of their Rare Butterfly Project. A mound of loose chalk was shaped into a south facing crescent and seeded with Kidney Vetch and other native chalk loving plants. In the first year it was successful in attracting Small Blues to the farm.

A suitable site is likely to be an island about 8ft x 4ft , sculptured into a crescent shape of bare chalk, sheltered and facing south. It will be seeded with Kidney Vetch and other compatible plants such



as Horseshoe Vetch. Creating the islands on The Ridgeway track itself is unlikely to be permitted, as it is classed as a 'road'. Cultivated fields alongside are also unsuitable. So the most likely locations are uncultivated field corners near the track, for which landowner permission will be needed. Sites need to be within 2 or 3 miles of each other, and near an existing population of Small Blues (which could be difficult to assess). There must be no underlying archaeological features (also difficult to assess). Work will be needed to create the crescent islands, probably by small machinery, and to seed them.

To ensure enough Kidney Vetch for future years, there is a need for volunteers to propagate the plants from seed, either to plug stage for planting in the islands, or fully grown for seed collection and seeding in subsequent years. Once established, ongoing monitoring of butterflies and plants will be important.

[www.sheepdrove.com/506.htm](http://www.sheepdrove.com/506.htm) Sheepdrove Rare Butterfly Project  
[www.butterfly-conservation.org](http://www.butterfly-conservation.org) and go to Butterflies, A-Z, Small Blue.

## A GOOD WALK

What is it about walking, particularly hill-walking, that feels so good?

From the Ridgeway, there are so many hidden, inviting paths which can lead us somewhere new and, using the rights of way, discover where they lead. Walking is also great for self-discovery: time and again, a walk will put matters into refreshing perspective and make us consider again the things that seemed intractable before.

Have you had an epiphany moment when on a walk? It has been said that ‘angels whisper’ to someone walking and I have certainly had some great ideas for making my fortune when out and about (a pity that I can never remember the detail on my return). Poets such as Wordsworth and Shelley used solitary walks for creative inspiration, and original thought seems to spring from the rhythmical tread of striding along.

Walking is great exercise. Per mile, walking uses up almost as many calories as jogging and is much more lenient on your joints too. It improves physical fitness by lowering the resting heart rate, reducing blood pressure, and increasing the efficiency of the heart and lungs.

Solitary walking is good but getting to know people is often achieved by suggesting a walk together. There’s something about walking side by side, often having to shout your views as the wind is blowing the words out of your mouth that makes for friendships. Jane Austen’s novels, *Persuasion* and *Sense and Sensibility* describe meetings and friendships made



through such convivial walks. Looking at the photos of the Avebury Rocks walk in July there were a great many such scenes of walking and talking.

Watching wildlife is central to a walk. You can spend several minutes stopped in your tracks, staring intently at a bush waiting for the movement of a small bird that has sung the most beautiful melodious notes.

At this time of the year walking is easy with soft breezes, the sun on your face and clear views. I love a winter walk too when the ground has stone-hard ruts and the grasses are rimmed with frost. You walk uphill, pulling off scarves and hat, lungs bursting, blood circulating and fingers and toes tingling. What a way to feel alive!

Happy walking!

Louise Tinker

## **THE LAST SUMMER OF MARCHAM EXCAVATIONS**

After eleven years of excavations, this is the last summer at Marcham for the Oxford University School of Archaeology 'Vale & Ridgeway Project'. The archaeology discovered spans the Iron Age to Romano-British and early Saxon, and the purpose of the whole site is thought to be religious. A large quantity of material has been collected which needs to be written up, estimated to be 5 or 6 years of work. Over the years, 48 trenches have been opened up and those still open will be filled in and the top soil replaced. The site is privately owned and unclassified, although the adjacent area containing the Temple is classified as a 'scheduled ancient monument'. The owners are keen to

preserve what lies beneath their land, it is currently 'set aside'. In the past, it has only been shallow ploughed, thus leaving the underlying archaeology undisturbed.



On July 20th, the Project Director Dr Gary Lock led our group of 30 people around the site. Two main features are the Iron Age Temple and the Amphitheatre. The Temple is thought to be important and sacred, first excavated in the 1930s by Bradford & Goodchild and subsequently by Dr Lock and his team. The Amphitheatre at the other end of the field is surrounded by a wall 1.75m high and dug out in the middle revealing a stone drain running through. White and red plaster has been found, implying that it was a bright and colourful place. Built on deep loam soil, it would have been wet and boggy. It is thought that water was religiously significant in both the Roman and Iron Age.

A new excavation this year has uncovered distinctly different types of soil, big black-brown patches surrounded by pale sandy soil. A large number of Roman artefacts (pottery, bones) have been found only in the black-brown areas, leading to speculation that these could have been rubbish dumps or pits for sacred offerings, linked by access paths. A

stone drain under the surface links this area to the Amphitheatre the other side of the field.

Another new site this year is from the Iron Age. Pits, ditches, post holes and banks have been found using geophysics and magnetometry (magnetic signature of features). Three circular enclosures of about 20m diameter have been identified, probably too big for domestic use, but perhaps animal pens? Or religious enclosures? In the many pits, pottery, animal bones, iron slag, and metal items have been found. The pits are scrappy and some inter-cut together, so were unlikely to be for food preservation.

Over the site as a whole, many animal bones and skeletons, some complete, have been found, but if human remains are taken away they must be reburied within 2 years. Pottery finds are very important, as the type and context in which they are found is very informative. A trench has been reopened this year containing a large hole filled with water, surrounded by laid stone surfaces. Could this have been a bath house? Unfortunately there may not be enough time to find out.

Project website: [www.arch.ox.ac.uk/VRP1.html](http://www.arch.ox.ac.uk/VRP1.html)

Janet Hierons

### *The Junior Ridgeway Explorer Page*

#### *The Legend Of Wayland The Smith*

Most of the ancient sites on or close to The Ridgeway have interesting legends attached to them and Wayland's Smithy is no exception; it dates back to the discovery by Saxon settlers of a Neolithic long barrow near Uffington which they attributed to Wayland the Smith.

Wayland, according to legend, was one of three sons of Wade, King of the Finns, he became a renowned metalworker and fashioned many swords (one of which was said to be for Merlin) and beautiful pieces of jewellery which were very much sought after. Fame however did not interest him, he only wished to be allowed to continue his work in peace. The King of Sweden though wished the pieces Wayland made to be exclusively for his royal family and so had him captured, imprisoned and put to work on a nearby island. His brother Egil was also captured and made to work in the royal household.

Wayland was determined to escape and had Egil make him a pair of wings with which he took flight and escaped flying far away until he came to rest on the Berkshire downs where he came across the ancient burial chamber which became his home and we now know as Wayland's Smithy. There is a further twist to this escapade; as he was flying away the king commanded Egil to shoot Wayland down – Egil chose two of the sharpest arrows, placed the first in his bow and fired, it pierced a small sac of blood which Wayland had hidden amongst his clothing and it was believed that he had been killed. The King asked Egil why, being such a good shot, he had chosen two arrows to which he replied “to shoot thee with the second should the first have harmed by brother”.

The amazing White Horse, set into the chalk nearby was said to have been shod by Wayland for Sigurd, a Norse hero, and every hundred years, so it is told, it leaves the hillside and gallops across the sky to Wayland's Smithy to be re-shod. This may be where the story of leaving one's horse and a small silver coin whilst one goes for a walk originates: the horse will be re-shod before your return but Wayland is never seen.

Have you ever heard of the word flibbertigibbet, defined as meaning a restless or frivolous person? Well, Wayland was said to have had an apprentice of this name who exasperated him so very much that one day he took him and threw him as far as he could into the Vale. It is said that on the spot where he landed he remains, petrified, to this day in a field called Snivelling Corner!

For a fuller story of Wayland the  
Smith visit  
[www.mysteriousbritain.co.uk](http://www.mysteriousbritain.co.uk)  
and/or [www.berkshirehistory.com](http://www.berkshirehistory.com).

## **FOOTPATH RESTORED AT COURT HILL CENTRE**

Thanks are due to Bridget Benn and her helpers who have restored an old footpath adjacent to the A338 (the Wantage to Hungerford road ) which runs between the Ridgeway and the Court Hill Centre. This means that walkers do not have to brave the traffic on this busy road to reach the Centre.



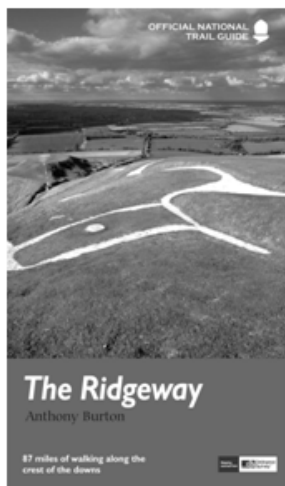
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## FOR THE DIARY

**6<sup>th</sup> September:** Talk on ‘The Uffington Connection with the White Horse’; short walk and tea. Meet 2pm at Tom Brown’s School Museum in Uffington

**20<sup>th</sup> October:** Avebury and Stonehenge – new discoveries. Talk by Jim Gunter

**17<sup>th</sup> November:** Talk on St Adhelm and the origins of Wessex

For further details of these last two events, contact Joyce Gardner (01367) 710743 or [joycegardner@hotmail.co.uk](mailto:joycegardner@hotmail.co.uk)