

# The Friends of The Ridgeway

Autumn E-Newsletter, October, 2015

From The Chairman,

Dear Friends,



Several sayings come into my mind to encapsulate the flood of activities over the *past few months; these must include 'Doesn't time fly when you are enjoying yourself' and 'When one door closes, another opens'*. It only seems a short time ago that, as my then commitments were drawing to a close, I first met with Ian and Jeff to talk about being nominated as Chairman of the Friends of the Ridgeway; in fact it was almost 5 months ago in May. Since then I have been trying to learn about the Friends of the Ridgeway as well as becoming involved in various activities. And continuing to enjoy forays on the trail with my camera.

In 1949 a series of long distance paths were created, one of those envisioned was the Ridgeway route from Cambridge to Seaton in Devon. Despite being the oldest road, the Ridgeway Trail was only formally opened on 29<sup>th</sup> September 1973. And even this was not for the full route but a much a shorter trail between Avebury and Ivinghoe Beacon.

Arising from the Ridgeway Conservation Conference, convened in 1972, the Friends of the Ridgeway was formally constituted in 1983. Although the Friends had a general objective of protecting the trail, the main focus was the recreational use of motor vehicles, particularly off-road motor bikes and 4x4s, often driven aggressively. The surface of the Trail was severely damaged in many places, becoming a sea of mud in the winter and then dangerously rutted as it dried in the summer. Precious archaeological sites were damaged and other users were disturbed by engine noise.

The Ridgeway's origins as an ancient highway meant that it was classified as a Byway Open to All Traffic. The Friends of the Ridgeway, in addition to building up its membership, lobbied for more effective legislative and regulatory protection. Attempts to introduce a Traffic Regulation Order under the 1984 Road Traffic Regulation Act failed. However, the Green Lanes Protection Group, led by David Gardiner and the Friends of the Ridgeway led by Ian Ritchie, proved an effective lobbyist for legislative change. Finally the use of motor vehicles on trails was extinguished by the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act, 2006.



Today most of the Ridgeway Trail has been reclassified, banning motor vehicles. There are now only about 3 miles of the trail that are open to motor vehicles all the year round. A further section of 14 miles in Wiltshire is still the subject of a Traffic Regulation Order with motor vehicle rights for 5 months each summer; this includes sections of vulnerable archaeology approaching Avebury.

In conjunction with the campaign to remove motor vehicles from the trail, the future of the trail was being secured by the formation of the Ridgeway Partnership. The Partnership is an association of all stakeholders along the route both local authorities and user groups. Funding for maintenance and development of the trail comes from Natural England and the various County Councils. As part of the formation of the Partnership Sarah Wright was appointed as Trail Officer.



The restriction of motor vehicles and formation of the Ridgeway Partnership give testament to the activities of the Friends of the Ridgeway, under the chairmanship of Ian Ritchie aided by Jeff Goddard. But this huge success leads to a question about the future objectives for the Friends of the Ridgeway; clearly the association has to carve out a new role for itself. There is a debate to be had – which will be the main item for discussion at the forthcoming Committee Meeting.

It could be argued (not by me!) that having achieved the purposes for which it was established, the Friends of the Ridgeway should be wound up, leaving the Ridgeway Partnership to be guardian of the trail. However, the Friends of the Ridgeway are the only stake holder in the partnership whose remit includes the whole trail. And furthermore it is possible to envisage a scenario when the security of the trail is under threat.

In my opinion the Ridgeway is a wonderful resource for all the communities that live along its route as well as to the wider community; this resource must be preserved and protected for future generations and its benefits brought to the attention of as many people as possible. This, I suggest, is the future role the Friends of the Ridgeway must play. I wish to continue to enjoy my, albeit short, walks along the path with my camera; if you see an old man wandering along, stopping to take photographs, please say 'Hello'.



*Anthony Burdall*



## The Ridgeway Partnership

Since its launch in June the new Ridgeway Partnership has been busy getting to grips with on-going maintenance issues and setting the framework for its future development plans. The Partnership Board, with members representing all of the participating organisations, under the Chairmanship of Ian Ritchie, meets quarterly, most recently in September. Two working groups have also been set up, one for Trail Delivery, and one for Promotion and Development. The Trail Delivery Group (TDG) brings together the existing National Trails Team based with Oxfordshire CC at Eynsham, the Ramblers and the Chilterns Society, all of whom maintain volunteer schemes. The TDG ensures co-operation and consistency between all these schemes and the most efficient maintenance operation possible for The Ridgeway. The Promotion and Development Group (PDG) oversees the strategy for raising awareness of The Ridgeway and for enhancement of the various aspects of its appeal. Both groups are supported by Sarah Wright, the Ridgeway Officer, who is responsible for ensuring the day to day operations and providing a public face for the Trail.



Plans considered by the PDG build on the Strategy agreed in advance of the Partnership's formation, centring on the five themes of the ancient, natural, sporting, creative and living Ridgeway. A development programme, the Ridgeway Refreshment, identifies some possible initiatives within each



theme, and it is planned to move towards discussions with potential partners over this winter. There are already a number of ideas being formulated and the necessary networks are starting to develop, to identify the various interests that will need to be involved and existing projects and energies that could be brought together. A first Ridgeway Forum under the new regime is about to be held, and will be focussed on tourism and our

partners in this industry. Our own Association will be considering how best we can focus our support, with a particular interest at this stage in the creative aspects. We shall bring you more news on this as plans develop.

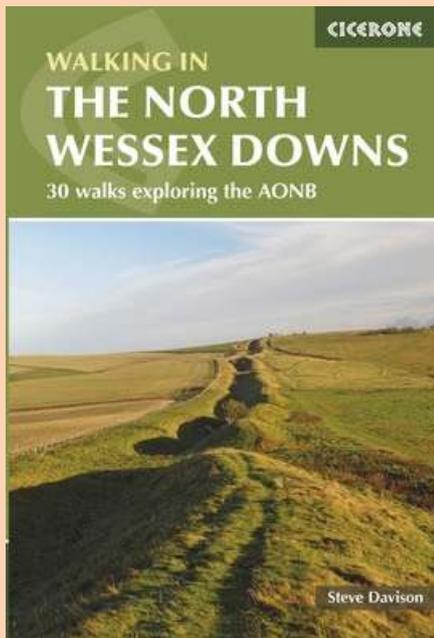
*Jeff Goddard*

## The Annual General Meeting, 2016 – A Note for your Diary!

The Committee has agreed that the AGM next year will be held on Sunday, 24<sup>th</sup> April, 2016, at a time and place to be advised later. Details next time!

## Walking in the North Wessex Downs

By Steve Davison; published by Cicerone Press



*30 walking routes exploring the North Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB). The routes are between 7 to 20km through this peaceful rolling chalk landscape covering parts of four counties: Berkshire, Hampshire, Wiltshire and Oxfordshire, with descriptions to reach the highest points in each one.*

“I have lived in the North Wessex Downs for over 20 years and have grown very fond of the area. As Steve Davison acknowledges in his excellent new book, it is a large, little developed, tranquil and beautiful part of the country. It is close to large areas of population and yet, other than honeypots such as Avebury, it attracts few visitors when compared to adjacent areas such as The Cotswolds and The Chilterns. This new book should help change that, as well as encouraging ‘us locals’ to get out and explore some of the countryside on our doorsteps.

I have a fondness for the format of Cicerone guide books. They are clearly written, a handy size to drop into a map pocket and, best of all for me, they use Ordnance Survey mapping. I also have a fondness for Steve Davison’s books. He enriches the essential practicalities of the walking routes with numerous interesting digressions on the villages, the churches, the wildlife, the geology and the history through which you pass. I was already familiar with a number of the 30 walks in the book but was inspired to try a few new ones. In every case they proved enjoyable and the descriptions in the book proved accurate and informative.

In any book review it is usual to find fault with something. Praise is usually followed by a “but.....”. Here I have no reservations. I recommend this book to those familiar and unfamiliar with the North Wessex Downs. The walks are between just over 4 miles to 12 miles in length, with varying degrees of severity. There is something for everyone. Beg, borrow or steal a copy, put your boots on and get out into this wonderful countryside.”

*Ian Ritchie*