

# The Friends of The Ridgeway

Spring Newsletter, February 2017



## From The Chairman

Dear Friends,

It's that time of year again as I write. Somehow a let-down after the excitement leading up to the Christmas festivities, the shopping, and parties and feasting and friends. The weather adds to this spirit of drabness with short days, cold and wet although occasionally leavened with crisp winter sunshine.

But it is also the time of year for thoughts on how we can improve our lives and resolutions – when various organisations send out Newsletters and the like exhorting us to support their activities. One such that landed on our doormat was from the National Trust with a headline of **“New Year’s resolutions – get involved”**. It went on to say *‘This year, instead of giving something up, why not take up something that makes you happy’* and suggested that *‘New Year’s resolutions aren’t just about giving things up. January is dreary enough without denying ourselves simple pleasures. New Year’s resolutions can be about a fresh perspective and openness to new adventures that bring joy’*. I could not have put it better.

The Friends of the Ridgeway have a very real job to do. It is committed to the preservation in perpetuity of all the natural aspects and features of the ancient Ridgeway. The Ridgeway is a wonderful resource for all the communities that live along its route as well as for 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 is the past, present and continuing future task of The Friends of The Ridgeway.

But we cannot continue without some volunteers to help run and administer the organisation. Existing Committee Members who have given many years’ service to the Friends now wish to stand down and pass the baton onto others to carry the work forward. If you value the Ridgeway please volunteer to make a small contribution of time to help so that we can fulfil our objectives.

Some time ago an appeal was launched to all members asking them to approach friends and family suggesting that they might like to support our work by becoming members. Increasing membership is, we believe, vital if the Ridgeway is to be protected for future generations. Thank you to all who have recruited new members and a very big welcome to all new members. If you have not already done so, please do talk to friends and neighbours – they may well be very interested in the work of The Friends of the Ridgeway.

For many of us, the Ridgeway is a lot more than a walking trail – it is a historic monument, an archaeological treasure and, certainly for me, it is an artistic inspiration. This perception has led to us establishing the Swire Ridgeway Art Prize. Some entries have been received and we hope for many more.

Winter will pass and soon Spring will arrive; not only a chance to get out along the trail but also an opportunity to appreciate the Ridgeway in all its variety - and a good moment to volunteer help with our mission!

With all best wishes,

*Anthony Burdall*



## The Swire Ridgeway Arts Prize

As previously announced, the Committee has taken advantage of a very generous donation by a member to launch the Swire Ridgeway Arts Prize to celebrate and promote the creative potential of the Ridgeway in a range of artistic media. This is the first of what it is hoped will be a five-year programme. Prizes will be offered in the categories of painting, sculpture, photography and writing (poetry or prose), for art works showing aspects of The Ridgeway, its history and environs, in any season, and there will be an overall winner. As many as possible of the Entries for all categories will be exhibited at the Thomas Hughes Memorial Hall, Uffington, in conjunction with the AGM, on Saturday and Sunday 22<sup>nd</sup> and 23<sup>rd</sup> April 2017. The Rules for the first year of the competition are available on our web-site, or from the Committee. Some entries have already been received but, we hope with many more to follow; the closing date for entries is Monday 27<sup>th</sup> February 2017.

The Prize is being publicised as widely as possible, and members are asked to assist with this effort by distributing the flyer accompanying this Newsletter within their community and to any friends or neighbours who may be interested. We would also like to hear from anyone willing to volunteer to help with setting up and/or curating the Exhibition, and its various logistical challenges! Please give me a call.

*Anthony Burdall*



## News from The Ridgeway Partnership,

The Partnership held its most recent Meeting on Monday 5th December, last year. The key item on the agenda was of course the financial situation, and the implications of Natural England's (NE's) expected grant reductions. There are sufficient funds for the current financial year to 31st March 2017, after making some stringent economies, but the situation for the year from 1st April 2017, remains unclear. The National Trail Partnerships acting together still await notice of the reduced grants that may be available to them, and are in the meantime developing their vision for the future of the National Trails network including its funding strategy.

It is now clear that NE is seeking to establish a new funding model for Trails, that will be less reliant on the public purse, and that this hands-off approach is accompanied by a reluctance to regulate or provide increased protection against abusive use.

The Partnership's new Fund-raising group, including our Chairman, has also met to consider ways of bridging the finance gap opening up for the Partnership, setting a target for raising £20,000 for 2017/18. The Group agreed that in the short-term the main source would have to be a public appeal and a small working party has been formed to take this forward. Since the Partnership is neither a legal entity nor a charity, there is likely to be a key role for the Friends of the Ridgeway in supporting such an appeal.

Other news from the Partnership is mixed, with most progress being made on the new Strategic Links project for access routes to the Ridgeway. Ten walking and two cycling routes have been surveyed, serving some of the principal settlements near the Ridgeway, and local communities and other stakeholders are being consulted. Contacts with Sports event organisers have led to a general agreement by them to contribute £1 per participant towards the costs of maintaining the Trail. This will boost Partnership revenue by nearly £1,000 this year, with prospects of 3 or 4 times that amount in future years.

Liaison with Oxford University Dep't of Plant Sciences has led to approval for an ecological research project centred on the Ridgeway; and the Reading-based Museum of English Rural Life and the Landscape Institute will be co-operating on a Ridgeway archive. Other development plans for the Heritage and Creative Ridgeway theme programmes have been held back by the funding uncertainties.

As noted in the last issue, a Research Group report concluded that damage has been done to the sensitive archaeology of the Ridgeway within the Avebury World Heritage Site, and that the poor condition of the Trail here requires careful restoration work. Progress towards a new permanent Traffic Regulation Order on the Ridgeway within the Avebury WHS to ensure subsequent protection has been slow, but continues; it is hoped that the protection will be in place in time for the start of the summer season.

Jeff Goddard

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### Annual General Meeting, 2017 – Preliminary Notice

The AGM will take place on Sunday, 23<sup>rd</sup> April, 2017, in the Thomas Hughes Memorial Hall, Uffington, Oxfordshire, SN7 7RA , commencing at 3.00 pm. The AGM will be accompanied by an Exhibition of entries for the Swire Ridgeway Arts Prize, and the category and overall Prize winners will be announced at the meeting.

All Trustees are subject to re-election at the AGM, and there are a number of vacancies to be filled. If you can volunteer your time and skills, and would like to contribute towards the objectives of the Association, please get in touch with the Secretary.

## The Vale of White Horse Local Group

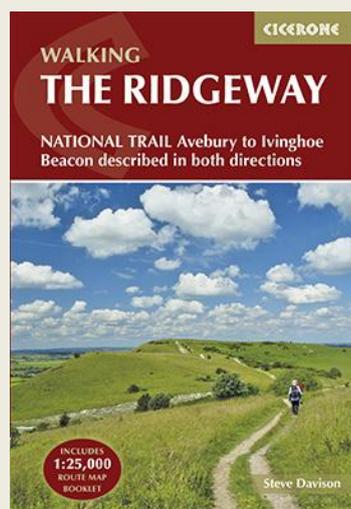
Over the year, the Friends of the Ridgeway Vale Of The White Horse Local Group hold a series of meetings, talks and activities on a range of topics of interest to lovers of the countryside. The latest programme of events is:

- 16 February 2017: Sarah Wright, The Ridgeway Trail Officer: "The Future of the Ridgeway and the Ridgeway Partnership"
- 16 March 2017: Eric Jones: "Middle Ridgeway – The History and Environment"
- 8 May 2017: Evelyne Godfrey: "Uffington - Hill and Vale, in the Ages of Stone, Bronze and Iron"
- June 2017: Proposed Visit and Walk around City Farm, Eynsham
- July 2017: Guided Walk around Stanford in the Vale
- 21 September 2017: Lawrence Bee: "Talking Trees" - the work of the Woodland Trust in the UK
- 19 October 2017: Mike White : "The Veiled Vale" - Legends and Ghost Stories from the Vale and beyond
- 16 November 2017: Patrick Dillon: "Middle Ridgeway" - the history and artistic connections.

All talks take place at the Old Town Hall in Faringdon on the third Thursday of the month. Members of the Friends of the Ridgeway may attend at no cost and visitors are very welcome for an entry fee of £3 per visit. Car sharing to the walks can be facilitated.

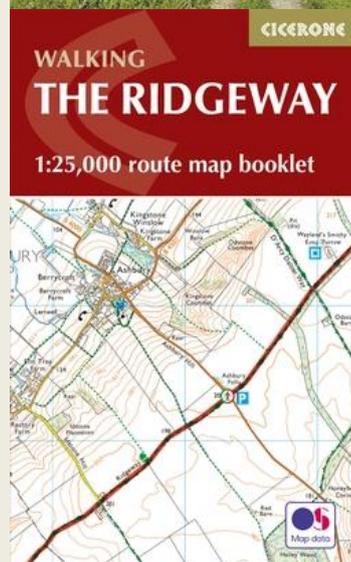
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## Review: Ridgeway Guide 'Walking The Ridgeway'



**Author Steve Davison, published by Cicerone, ISBN 978 1 85284 874 3**  
**Recommended retail price £16.95**

When I reviewed the first edition of this book three years ago I chose it as my favourite of the many walking guides to The Ridgeway on the market. The reasons I favoured it then remain with the second edition – it is a handy size (it will fit into the pocket of your anorak), it describes the route in both directions, the text and the mapping are clear (I always favour OS maps in preference to sketch maps) and it contains much useful advice on planning your walks along the Trail. It gives a good overview of the history of the route, its plants, wildlife and geology, accommodation and transport links. Steve Davison makes a very agreeable walking companion – throughout the guide he provides interesting snippets of information about places on and just off the route and there are ample excellent photographs (taken by Steve, I believe).



The second edition contains a few necessary updates to reflect changes over the past three years but the big difference comes with the provision of a separate route map booklet showing the complete Trail on 1:25,000 OS mapping. This slim and light booklet would be quite adequate to carry with you when walking The Ridgeway and obviates the need to purchase and carry the four individual OS maps you would otherwise need. It is printed on quality paper that looks to me to be capable of resisting the odd shower. The guide and booklet are bound together in a clear plastic cover that certainly would help keep both dry should the rain begin to penetrate your anorak pocket or rucksack. The provision of the map booklet comes at a price, with the second edition being some £4 more expensive than its predecessor. To my mind it is well worth it. If anyone who bought the earlier version wishes to update it, the map booklet is available to buy separately.

Ian Ritchie  
Chairman, The Ridgeway Partnership

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