

The Friends of The Ridgeway

Autumn Newsletter, October 2017



From The Chairman

Dear Friends,

The year turns and summer has given way to the season of mists and mellow fruitfulness. Soon winter will be here and the Christmas festivities. Our ancient British forebears would have been equally aware of the changing seasons as they walked the intertwining Ridgeway paths. The constantly changing pattern of the seasons brings to mind the evolution of the Ridgeway and its relevance, from ancient highway through to today's recreational and environmental role.

With these thoughts in mind, your Committee and I, in accordance with our stated objectives, are minded to explore the possibility of establishing a coast-to-coast walking route along existing Ridgeway tracks, as noted in the article below. The route, once successfully established, would run from Lyme Regis in Dorset to Holme-next-the-Sea near Hunstanton in Norfolk, incorporating of course the Ridgeway National Trail. It would be exciting to bring back to life the original function of these ancient tracks.

The preservation of the ancient Ridgeway paths along the chalk downs of Southern England is the purpose for which the Friends of the Ridgeway exist. If the Ridgeway was ever to be safe from threats and abuse there would no role for us, but regrettably that is not the case. Various development schemes that impact upon the Ridgeway continue to be promoted. The Ridgeway Partnership still lacks financial stability, arousing concern about its long term maintenance commitments. Natural England has established a Motoring Stakeholder Working Group to consider the impact and management of vehicles on green lanes (which include the Ridgeway); we are represented on the working group but progress is very limited and realistically unlikely to lead to any further legislation or restrictions on motor vehicle use on green lanes.



To help the Committee with our mission to preserve the Ridgeway, we are delighted to welcome three new Trustees – Nikki Swan, Andy Greenhalgh and Diney Godfrey; background information on each is given below. However, we would welcome further committee members to bring us up to the numbers indicated by the constitution.

The Ridgeway is a lot more than just a walking route; inter alia it is an artistic inspiration as shown by the Swire Ridgeway Art Competition in April. Following the success of the first event, another competition will be held next year, with the Prizes again awarded after our AGM, on Sunday 22 April 2018. Details are given below. Assistance with setting up the exhibition would be most welcome.



Winter will soon be upon us, but with the joys of the festive season to brighten the darkness, and with the new birth of spring to follow. Let's ensure that for all seasons to come the Ridgeway is preserved for all.

With all best wishes
Anthony Burdall

The Swire Ridgeway Arts Competition, 2018



As members will be aware, The Friends of The Ridgeway has taken advantage of a generous donation to establish an arts competition and prize – the Swire Ridgeway Arts Prize. Following the success of the first event, the Committee has decided that another competition will be held in 2018. The theme of next year's competition is *'Spirit of the Ridgeway'*.

The competition will once again be an open event, with separate classes for painting, sculpture (including ceramics), photography and writing (poetry or prose). The closing date for entries will be one month prior to the Ridgeway Friends Day (i.e. 22 March 2018); and the results of the competition will be announced and prizes awarded at the Ridgeway Friends Day planned for 22 April 2018. Each category winner will receive a keeper prize plus £100, and the overall winner will receive a keeper prize plus £250 and a trophy. All entrants will receive one year's membership of The Friends of The Ridgeway.

Why not seek artistic inspiration from the Ridgeway and then, through the Swire Ridgeway Arts Prize, share it with all those that love and value the Ridgeway?

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The Great Chalk Way

As members are aware, our preservation interests extend beyond the Ridgeway National Trail to the chalk trackways more generally, and we have a long-standing ambition to raise awareness of the ancient routes



between the Wash and the Dorset coast. Our designation of The Great Stones Way was of course a first step in this direction. This complex of braided paths and trackways, linking Stone, Bronze and Iron Age monuments and hill-forts, has great potential heritage and recreational value.

Our interests are shared by others, and in particular by our colleagues in the Icknield Way Association (IWA), and those responsible for the

Peddars Way and the Wessex Ridgeway, all of them based on heritage routes forming part of the complex. The IWA has recently taken the initiative to promote the concept of a coast-to-coast route, ideally to be designated in its entirety as a National Trail, as was the original plan before the practical difficulties and costs led to the designation of its central section alone as the present Ridgeway National Trail.

Your Committee has recently met with IWA to discuss this initiative. Although recognising that in present circumstances it would be unrealistic to add to the numbers and costs of the National Trail network, we agreed to press ahead with a project for a new recreational walking route linking the existing Ridgeway, Icknield Way, Peddars Way, Great Stones Way and sections of the Wessex Ridgeway. We shall need to determine a link route across Cranborne Chase between Salisbury and the Wessex Ridgeway to complete the 400 or so miles between Holme-next-the-Sea on the Wash and Lyme Regis on the Dorset coast.

We also agreed on the name The Great Chalk Way for the proposed new route. We envisage that, like the ancient complex of braided and parallel tracks that we all believe comprised the ancient route, the new scheme will have the flexibility to incorporate alternative paths for different types of users, and other deviations. We have set up a working group to determine the route in greater detail and to start to consult all the various interests concerned. Since the plan is simply to link existing way-marked routes and rights of way we don't expect to incur any significant costs. We shall keep you informed of how we get on!



Jeff Goddard

The Ridgeway Partnership

The Partnership Chairman, Ian Ritchie, has announced that he will be standing down at the end of the first three years of the Partnership's existence, in April, 2018. A new independent candidate is being sought to take over as Chairman, and it is hoped that the person selected will be announced before Christmas. Jeff Goddard will also be stepping down as the informal Secretary.

The Partnership held its first Annual Forum jointly with the North Wessex Downs AONB in Uffington on 18 October. The next Board meeting of the Partnership is due to be held in Abingdon on 23 October, at which progress to date, and the prospects for next year's budget will be considered.

New Trustees

Andy Greenhalgh (elected 23/4/17) : Andy lives in Bishopstone and is an enthusiastic long distance walker. Andy has taken on responsibility as Communications and Membership Secretary.



“My background is a Civil Engineer by education but computing by career choice. After 23 successful years in the industry I am now happily early retired and whilst not looking for paid employment I am keen to use what skills I have to give back to my local community.

I love the great outdoors and have travelled extensively to enjoy the wonders of our amazing planet. I am a keen skier but more relevant to Friends of the Ridgeway I am also a long time dog walker/hiker/fell walker and a member of the Ramblers Association. I have walked long distance hikes abroad (e.g. The Via Francigena in Italy and The Tahoe Rim Trail in the US) as well as several of our own wonderful long distance trails including our very special Ridgeway Trail. I walk along the Ridgeway most days and I am very proud to live in a village that enables me to do so.

My overt skills that I bring to the Friends are of course all tech related (e.g. I run several WordPress based web sites including our own Friends of the Ridgeway website). Less obvious are my soft skills in strategy, marketing, team management, communications, etc. which I hope will prove valuable to the Friends over time!”

Nikki Swan (elected 23/4/17): A Life Member of the Friends, Nikki lives directly on the Ridgeway at Streatley – ‘any time I go out’ she says ‘I have to walk the Ridgeway’. After travelling and working in Australia, Nikki took an MBA and later a Doctorate at Henley Management College, where she also teaches. She consults in the field of Sustainable Rural Development, specialising in Corporate Social responsibility, working with charities and NGOs as well as companies, internationally as well as in this country. Nikki divides her time between running her consultancy, and her voluntary activities. She has recently handed over as Chair of Streatley Parish Council, after 13 years in that post, and continues to work with a number of local and national charities. She will bring a wealth of relevant experience and a strong commitment to her appointment as a Trustee.

Diney Godfrey (co-opted 13/6/17): Diney lives in Charney Bassett.

“I was born and brought up in Wantage, on Chain Hill, on the way to the Ridgeway. I have been interested in riding since the age of 7, which makes it a lot of years now! When I was 11 I had my own pony which opened the way to explore the countryside, and the Ridgeway was just there. My friends and I spent all our free time wandering about, having adventures and upsetting gamekeepers. Often with one pony and a lot of bikes.

I had a cousin who lived on a farm near Theale, and my sister and I would go with a bike and a pony, as far as possible along the Ridgeway, and then along small roads to stay there for the summer holidays. I got a taste for long distance riding. When I was young I worked with hunters, hunter/chasers and racehorses, which meant more access to the Ridgeway and nearby places. A little later I opened my own riding school and ran this in various places in the locality. We also took children on long rides and camping holidays along the Ridgeway.



I spent about 7 years working as a stable manager for the local Riding for Disabled Association, and when I was there we took them for an annual holiday on the ponies. (The horse is in my mind the ultimate disability vehicle). I also do carriage driving for disabled. I belong to the British Horse Society, and used to help as a Bridleways Officer. Last year my family suffered from a very damaging fire, and I resigned to give myself time to help getting us all back on our feet again. I was told about the link with Friends of the Ridgeway and this seemed to be ideal for me.

I have also always been interested in folk music and songs, particularly local ones. I am one of the singers on a CD entitled ‘From The Vale’ (which is of course the Vale of the White Horse). My family and my husband’s family have lived in this area for generations. I have joined societies re-enacting the English Civil War, and

enjoy battling as a Musketeer or a Cavalryman. Some friends and I formed the Vale Islanders dance group who perform dances from this period”.

A Morning Walk

Ivinghoe Beacon to Princes Risborough – August 2017.

At 7 am in mid-August the sun was still low enough in the sky to cast the shadow of Ivinghoe Beacon and the Chiltern Hills far across the fields of the vale below. Rain the day before had left the turf damp underfoot and the air soft and hazy; fields and hedgerows below the hill were accentuated by their shadows but melded further away into a golden light promising the harvest to come. A few birds called and butterflies were making the most of the early morning, but otherwise little moved on a late summer Saturday morning.



For a resident of South London, used to traffic fumes in breach of international standards and a view only to the end of the street, the chance to breathe clean air and look out across several counties at once made the early start worthwhile.

There is a perception that the Ridgeway is hard to access, certainly from central London, but a direct train from Clapham Junction to Tring could hardly have been easier. Nick Hill's excellent Trailblazer guide to the Ridgeway warns of the exertions necessary to transfer to the end of the Ridgeway at the Beacon; this walker

cheated, as the first passenger of the day for the obliging taxi company at Tring station, but my conscience was salvaged by the thought of the miles I was intending to cover.

Ahead of me lay a surprising variety of tracks, lanes, byways and country roads; woods and open hillsides; steep climbs and broad views; but the chalk downland paths leading southwest from the Beacon itself were perhaps the most glorious. I met few people on those paths; some runners, a dog-walker or two and a solitary cyclist; but I was accompanied by flocks of yellowhammers and goldfinches, flitting along the path ahead of me, never still quite long enough to get the binoculars trained on them. A kestrel hovered then dropped, but I didn't see whether it was successful. Always ahead of me I could see where the Ridgeway would lead if I followed it long enough, all along the escarpment of the Chilterns to the narrow valley of the Thames and after that the Berkshire Downs. People had followed this route across southern England for millennia and always they had been able to see the route they were following, just as I was now.



Before long the path headed through trees and then back to Tring station where I had been a couple of hours earlier. Nick Hill comments that there is little reason to stop at Tring station and I must admit I was hoping for a late breakfast but was disappointed. Instead I headed on, over the Grand Union Canal (surprisingly small and quiet) and then over two major highways, the A4251 and, by means of a narrow and precipitous pedestrian bridge, the A41. A more attractive section of the Ridgeway led through



woods overlooking Tring with wonderful views down to the town below. Here I was overtaken by about 150 runners; apparently it is the route for Tring's parkrun and it was great to see so many people out on the Ridgeway on a Saturday morning.

After Tring Park, the Way is particularly varied. A solitary way-mark half-way across a field showed that I was not hopelessly out of my way. From there, the path led downwards through hidden woods thick with last year's leaves into a valley in which nestles the delightful village of Wendover, home to the equally delightful Crumbs Café, which I can report serves an excellent full English breakfast. Suitably restored, I headed southwest out of Wendover up the slope of Bacombe Hill, a maze of paths and rabbit runs with broad views towards Aylesbury. The path heads towards the Monument on Coombe Hill to men from Buckinghamshire



who died in the Boer War. The views are spectacular and the gathering clouds made for a suitably atmospheric backdrop against which to contemplate the adventures over a century ago which took men to plains and valleys so different to those which this memorial surveys. It also provides a glimpse of Chequers, the Prime Minister's country estate, which is otherwise largely hidden from view in its fold in the hills. The Ridgeway cuts through the grounds and across the main drive; the prominent signs warning against deviation from the path are enough to keep the curious sightseer from tarrying too long.

There is perhaps more chance of bumping into a politician at the excellent Plough pub in Cadsden, buried in a narrow valley but evidently very popular with locals and walkers alike. In pride of place above the bar is a photo, taken in the bar itself, of David Cameron and President Xi Jinping. The Prime Minister appears a little uncomfortable; the President looks calmly and quietly amused.

On either side of Cadsden, nature reserves are havens for wildlife, particularly butterflies. On Brush Hill, the flower carpet was still spectacular, and the view from Whiteleaf Hill, above the curious cross carved into the hillside, shows clearly the route of the Ridgeway across to the Thames valley. But that is a treat for another time. There are only so many hills that one can do with enthusiasm in a day. So it was with some relief that I ended my walk sitting on a bench on the platform at Princes Risborough station, watching a red kite hunting across the building site across the road. It was a reminder of how close we all are to the natural world, with just a little effort required to go and find it.

Charles Goddard

