



# The Friends of The Ridgeway

## Christmas E-Newsletter, December, 2014

### From The Chairman

Dear Friends,

The time has come! After 15 years as your Chairman I have decided to stand down at the occasion of our next Annual General Meeting in April, 2015. I want you to hear this news personally from me before it is announced on our website and becomes public knowledge.

I have enjoyed my time in this role and with your support we have achieved some notable successes. In particular I am very proud of what we have done to limit the use of motor vehicles on The Ridgeway and I am delighted that we have been able to open The Great Stones Way, linking Avebury and Stonehenge.



As we have intimated in our Newsletters, there are some major changes coming in the way The Ridgeway National Trail will be managed in the future. These changes are likely to have some profound implications for us. The old and unsatisfactory Ridgeway Management Group (comprising mainly the local authorities along the route) is to be replaced by a new Ridgeway Partnership. This will be a much broader-based and inclusive organisation, with representatives of the main users of the trail and other interested parties as well as the local authorities. We have been invited to join the Partnership and we have seized the opportunity. Indeed we are playing a central role in bringing about the establishment of the new body.

When the Ridgeway Partnership is operational and we are a member of it we will need to recast ourselves in a different role. In the past we have been outside the management group and have operated as a campaigning body, pressing the management group on the issues we think important. In future we will be part of the management group, trying to influence policy from the inside and being bound by the decisions of the Partnership. At our AGM we will consider the implications of this change and I urge you to put the date of 26<sup>th</sup> April, 2015, in your diaries. We would love to see a large turnout of members so that we can hear your views.

The change in the role of The Friends has prompted me to consider my position and I have decided it is the right time to hand over the reins to someone else. We are therefore seeking my successor. If you know of anyone who you think we should consider for the job, please let our Secretary, Jeff Goddard, know. His contact details are at the end of this Newsletter.

With very best wishes

Ian Ritchie  
Chairman

## The Ridgeway Partnership

As the end of 2014 approaches, the change-over to a new structure for The Ridgeway National Trail is gathering momentum, and rapidly becoming a reality. We continue to be at the heart of the process. Your Chairman, Ian, is now acting as Chair also of the new Shadow Ridgeway Partnership, and your Secretary is taking the minutes and has drafted much of the documentation. The Partnership itself is taking shape, and has around a score of members, including both the AONBs, for the Chilterns and North Wessex Downs, all the local authorities involved, Natural England itself, National Trust, Ramblers, Chiltern Society and a number of other organisations, both public and private. The Partnership has met, as a Shadow body, and a development/strategy group has been formed. Oxfordshire County Council is likely to be the Lead Partner, and continue as Host Authority, with the joint National Trails Team and volunteers continuing to undertake at least some of the maintenance work. Preparations are in hand for recruitment of a Ridgeway Officer, hopefully on a full-time basis, if we can afford that. There is anxious discussion of a budget for the first year, and how the present short-fall in funding can be filled; we are approaching various partner and other organisations to see if they will contribute towards the core costs of the new structure.

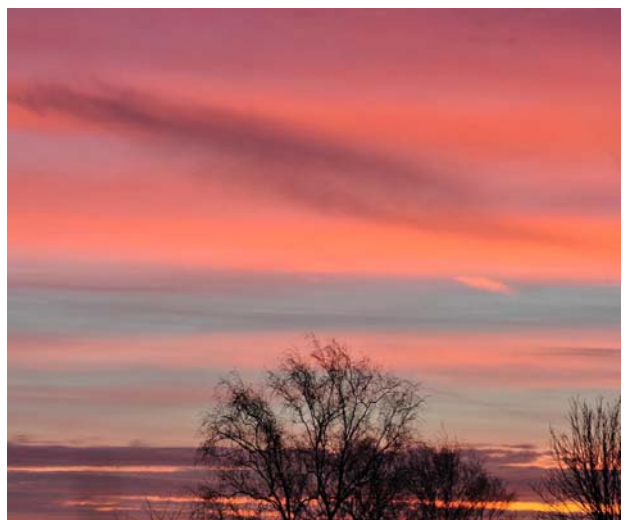


Meanwhile, a strategic framework has been drafted for the future improvement and promotion of The Ridgeway and its corridor, to enable the resource to reach its full potential, as part of the wider national and regional network of paths. We plan to raise awareness of all the various natural, recreational, heritage and artistic aspects of the path, and to work closely with as many as possible of the local and user communities along the route interested in its enjoyment. We shall aim to enhance the contribution of the Ridgeway corridor to biodiversity and the movement of wildlife,

to health and outdoor recreation, and to the economic benefit of local businesses. Improved access, information and linkages will be part of the plan, and we shall be seeking financial support from a variety of sources to make the necessary investments.

It is still the target that the Partnership will be up and running by the start of the next financial year in April 2015. The Partnership will have an inaugural meeting in the Spring, on a date still to be fixed, to adopt formal agreements and a Delivery Framework as required by Natural England, followed by a public launch and a first meeting of a Ridgeway Forum. An independent Chairman is yet to be appointed, who we hope will help to establish a strong identity for the Trail.

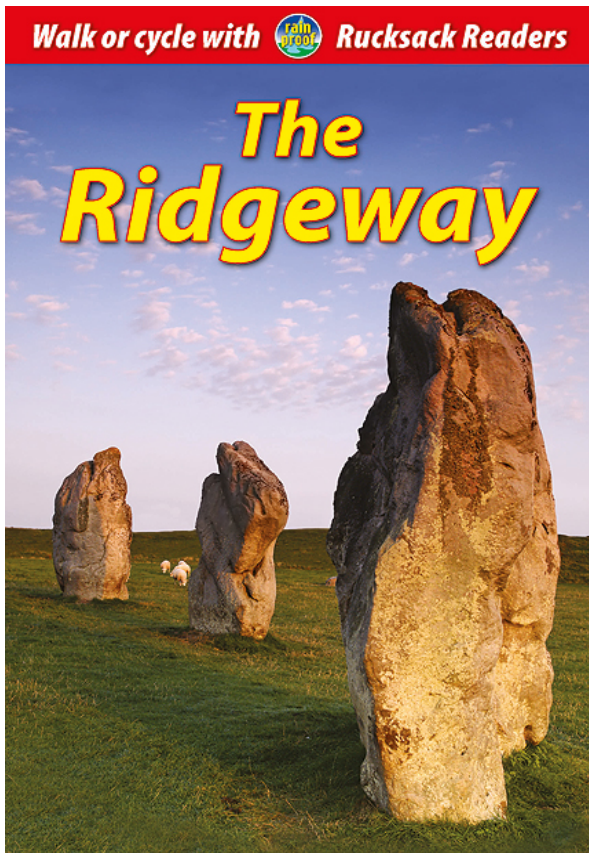
As Ian has noted, our membership of the new Partnership, that we shall be asking members to ratify at our AGM in April, will introduce important changes for us. We hope and intend to be able to influence the management and preservation of The Ridgeway, and to make a significant contribution to its activities, and look forward to the continued support of members in doing so.



Jeff Goddard, Secretary,

## A new Guide to walking The Ridgeway

When I heard that Rucksack Readers were publishing a new Ridgeway Guide book, my first reaction was to wonder why. I already have seven such books on my shelf and they all have their merits. However, having read the new book and used it on one section of the trail, I believe it is a very worthy addition to my collection of Guides and a strong contender for the one I would take with me the next time I walk the whole 87 miles.



Most Guides start with useful information on preparing yourself for the walk and this book is better than most in this respect. There is a handy guide to the facilities available along the route (transport, accommodation and shops) with suggested stages and timings for walkers and cyclists. The packing checklist seems a bit too obvious to anyone attempting such a walk but the gradient profiles are not found in most books. Unlike some others, this Guide has an index, which is something I value.

One area where this book scores for me is the excellent background information on the landscape, geology, history and flora and fauna. There is a balance to be struck between giving the reader enough information to be able to interpret and enjoy their walk, and giving too much, when the book becomes heavy and cumbersome to use. This Guide gets it right. It has a particularly good section on Avebury.

The notes on walking (or cycling) each section are clear and detailed, perhaps more detailed than is really necessary for anyone familiar with walking long distance trails. The Ridgeway National Trail does have excellent way-marking and so the instructions in the book should only be called upon occasionally for route finding. However, amongst the instructions are helpful comments about the sights along the way and these should make the journey a much richer experience.

All the comments so far suggest this Guide is a worthy addition to the existing bibliography on The Ridgeway. However there is more! The unique feature of Rucksack Readers is the format of their Guides. They are published in notebook format, spiral bound at the top with pages that flip over. In addition they have a fold out map of the route at the back and, by clever design, the map acts as a bookmark so it is very easy to use as you walk. Although the map is based on Ordnance Survey data the scale means that it contains little detail and you certainly need to take separate OS or Harvey's maps with you. The size of the book (14.5cms x 22cms) makes it too big to fit into some of the pockets in my walking gear but it does fit the map pocket of my anorak. And finally – it's waterproof! The publishers tell me that you can squirt water at it and it will survive unscathed, so it should be good for the odd shower on The Ridgeway.

Ian Ritchie

*The Ridgeway by Max Landsberg is published by Rucksack Readers, [info@rucsacs.com](mailto:info@rucsacs.com), ISBN 978-1-898481-70-6, at a price of £11.99, with free p&p. A special discount of £2.50 is offered to members of The Friends of The Ridgeway, available until 31<sup>st</sup> March by e-mail, and until 31<sup>st</sup> May by post. The Guide will be published in mid-March, but pre-orders can be placed now, which can be cancelled at any time. No money will be taken until despatched.*

To order by e-mail:

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Rucksack Readers, 6 Old Church Lane, Edinburgh, EH15 3PX



## From The Secretary

All members will, I'm sure, be very sorry to hear of our Chairman's resignation after his 15 years of successful leadership of our Association. This underlines the significance of the turning point in our affairs that the formation of the new Ridgeway Partnership will represent. Our work is not completed, indeed we have no doubt that the pressures of modern life on the ancient Ridgeway will continue to gather strength; but the challenges will be different and we shall need different approaches to confront and manage them, and to take advantage of the concomitant opportunities. This makes our General Meeting in 2015 a particularly important one, as we shall have to elect a new Chairman, fill other vacancies on the Committee, and consider our new role and relationships in the new management structure for The Ridgeway. The Committee hopes that as many members as possible will make sure to attend the AGM, to be held on 26<sup>th</sup> April, 2015, in Wantage. A booking has been made at the Vale & Downland Museum, subject to confirmation, from 1.30 pm.

The Ridgeway Day event will not be held in conjunction with the AGM on this occasion, to avoid any distraction from the business of the day. It is likely that a similar event will be held by the Ridgeway Partnership later in the year. The arrangements for a Speaker at the AGM will be advised in due course.

The Notice and Agenda will as usual be circulated with the Annual Report at the end of March, and will of course include proposals for election of Officers and Trustees. The Committee seeks nominations for the post of Chairman of the Association, and for two other vacancies on the Executive Committee, and members are asked to put forward suitable candidates for the posts as soon as possible by writing to me, by surface or e-mail, at the following address:

Jeff Goddard, 6 Darell Road, Caversham, Reading, RG4 7AY: or: [ridgewayfriends@googlemail.com](mailto:ridgewayfriends@googlemail.com)

Correspondence for the web-site, which can be sent at any time, should be sent to [ridgewayfriends@googlemail.com](mailto:ridgewayfriends@googlemail.com).

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 ancient Ridgeway track-ways along the chalk downs of Southern England.