

# The Friends of The Ridgeway

Summer E-Newsletter, July 2014



## From The Chairman

Dear Friends,

This Summer is turning out to be not only one of the best I can remember, for walking and for my garden, but also for our Association.

You will read below about the progress being made towards a new structure for the management of The Ridgeway, in the form of a public-private partnership that should bring together most of the bodies concerned with this unique and valuable Trail. I hope and believe that this agreement, not yet finalised but likely to be approved before long, will launch a new mechanism for the governance of The Ridgeway, that will be more responsive to users and all others who value its special atmosphere and environment.

Other things also have come together in recent months. The publication by Cicerone this month of a Guide-book to The Great Stones Way is a land-mark in the development of this project; and we shall be posting shortly a proper web-site for the route. Despite the loss of funding and the forced abandonment of our original plans for improvements to the route, it is now well established as a prime recreational walking route, with its own momentum, and we are confident that its improvement will follow in due course. Our long campaign to exclude the off-roaders and stabilise the surface of the National Trail has been effectively won, and our financial position is stable, thanks to a generous recent donation by a long-standing member. I think we can take some satisfaction from what we have achieved to date.

Nothing stands still, however, and we must look to the future. Our involvement in the new partnership will necessarily mean changes in our approach. We hope that we shall no longer need to be a campaigning group. I expect that we may become more of a conventional "Friends of.." organisation, involved in promotion and fund-raising for improvements and development. Perhaps we should focus more on the Greater Ridgeway and on its potential as an environmental corridor. Your Committee will be getting to grips with these new horizons over the coming months, and we shall need to know what you think. Please do let me have your thoughts, by whatever means you prefer. I look forward to hearing from you.

Ian Ritchie, 5<sup>th</sup> July, 2014

## The Ridgeway Trail Partnership

The Friends have been closely involved in the discussions over the future management of The Ridgeway, sparked off by Natural England's (NE's) decision to devolve the operations and funding of the National Trails to new Trail Partnerships. NE's objective is greater stakeholder participation, engaging not only walkers and other users, but also landowners, commercial providers and local communities, alongside the local authorities who are solely responsible at present. We believe it is important that the new stakeholders control strategy, and that greater emphasis is placed on promotion and development, with new resources mobilised. By early this year, it was agreed that the oversight of The Ridgeway should be separated from that of the Thames Path, although the maintenance might continue to be co-ordinated, and both the AONBs along The Ridgeway had joined the management group. We too have now agreed in principle to join the new Ridgeway Trail Partnership when it is formed, in recognition of the changed circumstances, and will be recommending this formally to members in due course.

Greater clarity is now emerging, following a consultancy review, on the future structure of a Ridgeway Trail Partnership (RTP) to be formed to decide the strategy and priorities of the Trail, and to control its budgets and development plans. The RTP will focus on engaging with other interested parties to take advantage of opportunities to enhance and develop the Trail and its environment, while ensuring its



preservation and standards. It is intended that the RTP will be established, with effect from April 2015, by formal agreements between a wide range of interested stakeholders, including the users, amenity societies, landowners and businesses concerned, as well as the relevant local authorities and AONBs. It will have an experienced, independent Chairman, and will establish a strong identity for the Trail, through enhanced promotion and information. An Annual Forum will be re-established to ensure accountability to and communications with the public. Oxfordshire County Council is likely to continue to be the accountable body and to host the volunteer-based maintenance operation, and a full-time Trail Development Manager will be recruited to provide a single point of contact with responsibility to the RTP and to stakeholders. The Friends have agreed in principle to join the RTP, subject to the concurrence of members. We would thereby no longer be an external observer of an official provider but a partner in its management, and this will have important implications for us that we shall need to explore further.

## The Ridgeway Day & AGM at Court Hill, Wantage, 10<sup>th</sup> May, 2014

At 10.00 am on Saturday, 10<sup>th</sup> May, the Dining Hall at The Court Hill Centre was a hive of activity. Despite the ferocious weather forecast, it was sunny, breezy and bracing outside, but inside there was a hubbub of tables being moved around, chairs stacked, and exhibits unfurled and erected. Old and new friends were busy setting up banners and displays. Oliver and Rose from North Wessex Downs AONB as first arrivals had chosen to be in the window bay where your Committee usually meet, and were setting out a wealth of brochures and guides. Mark Bradfield from BBOWT (Berks, Bucks and Oxon Wildlife Trust) was out in the beech wood setting up his birds nature trail, while his colleague Michael Bailey from the BBOWT Letcombe Valley Reserve was preparing to show his lovely films and images. In the far corner, Dorothy and Valerie from the Vale & Downland Museum had laid out their historic Collecting Box, and geological and fossil specimens, while Annette from the Chilterns Conservation Board AONB had taken a space on the long table in the middle, sharing it with the detailed map of The Ridgeway laid out by Steven Tabbitt, the Ridgeway NT Project Co-ordinator, and with Sarah Newman's cards and prints.

Our favourite artists, Anna Dillon and Gus Mills, were both there and had displayed a range of tempting paintings, prints and cards of their work; and our stalwart Janet Hierons found a space to set out the Friends' own cards for sale, featuring both of these artists' paintings. Chairman Ian Ritchie was directing operations and setting up a number of posters of Steve Davison's Cicerone Guides, with a few copies of the North Wessex Downs and Ridgeway Guides for sale. The poster announcing Steve's new Cicerone Guide to The Great Stones Way, due for publication in July, was of particular interest. Meanwhile, Secretary Jeff was setting up a Welcome desk in the porch, out of the wind.



All that was lacking was the entertainments for the day, and it wasn't long before Howard Hill and his fellow musicians arrived, ready to serenade us. They had hoped to play outside, but the wind and the risk of later rain made this too risky, so they soon settled for the splendid Minstrels Gallery perch above the fray, from which their traditional English and Celtic tunes provided just the right level of sound, adding a buzz to the atmosphere without drowning out conversation. Finally, Lisa Townsend and her girls brought along their fascinating owls, and roosted together in the sunny porch, drawing much attention and interest.

It wasn't long before the first visitors arrived, and Trustee Jim Gunter was preparing to lead his first walk along The Ridgeway to Segsbury Castle. A small band set off, with a few glances at the increasingly threatening sky, but his timing was perfect, arriving back at Court Hill Centre moments before the rain arrived. The showers stayed with us thereafter, but those who had braved the weather found much to entertain and interest them. The numbers were less than we had hoped for, alas, but the stay-at-homes missed an informative day.



**The 2014 AGM:** The Friends' AGM started as planned at 3.00 pm in the Beechwood Room, with an initial open session on the current talks on a new management structure for the National Trails and for The Ridgeway. Chairman Ian Ritchie gave us a short briefing on the progress of the New Deal proposed by Natural England, and the revised funding and organisational arrangements that are needed. After responding to questions, Ian called us to order, and proceeded with the formal AGM session. The Trustees' Report and Accounts had been circulated, with the Notice and Agenda, and Ian spoke briefly to this, noting that a Guide to the Great Stones Way is to be published shortly, and that we are working on a new, full web-site for this route, drawing on the Restricted Fund for this purpose. We have moved to e-mail for our Newsletters, but will continue to supply hard copies to any member on request.

Ian thanked the Committee, particularly Sally Barnes and Mike McQueen retiring as Treasurer and Membership Secretary respectively. Mike is standing down as a Trustee, but Sally will take over as Membership Secretary and continue on the Committee. Ian welcomed John Edgerton as our new Treasurer, and thanked all our other supporters and volunteers. The Accounts were approved, and due note taken of our need to reduce our recent losses. However, Ian dispelled the gloom by announcing with our warmest thanks a princely donation from one of our long-standing members, that will both bridge the immediate financial gap and enable us to plan new initiatives to raise the profile of The Ridgeway.

## The Cicerone Guide:

### THE GREAT STONES WAY Avebury, Stonehenge and Salisbury

PRICE: £7.95

ISBN: 978 1 85284 613 8

CODE: 613

PUBLICATION: July 2014

AUTHOR: Steve Davison

CONTENTS: 17.2cm by 11.6cm. 80pp.

Paperback Gloss Laminated

#### KEY MARKETING POINTS

The only guidebook available for this route

Links the Ridgeway National Trail with the major

archaeological sites of Wiltshire and Salisbury

Can be walked in a long weekend

Nearly half a million visitors to Stonehenge each year

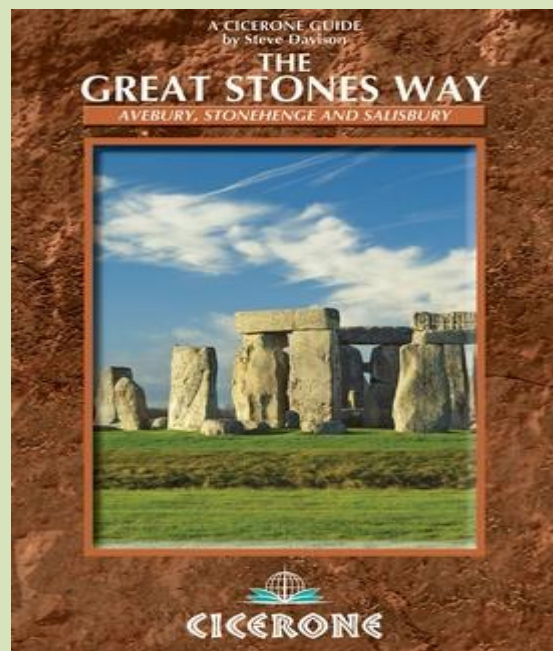
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Correspondence for the web-site, which can be sent at any time, should be sent to [ridgewayfriends@googlemail.com](mailto:ridgewayfriends@googlemail.com).

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..