

The Friends of The Ridgeway

Summer E-Newsletter, July, 2015

From Ian Ritchie: Chairman, 2001-15

Dear Friends,

Our AGM this year was not only another opportunity for me to greet old friends, and to report to you on the exciting and challenging changes that this year brings, but also to look back on my 15 years as your Chairman, and forwards to what I'm sure will be a new era of progress for The Ridgeway. I much appreciated that so many of you found time to come along, and I am most grateful for the kind words of our President, Lord

Bradshaw, on your behalf. I was overwhelmed by the generosity of so many of you who contributed to the presentation to me of a framed print of a wonderful painting by our great friend, Anna Dillon, of the Avebury Beeches. Looking at this, I shall always be reminded of my years as your Chairman, and of all that we achieved together.



I was sorry that I could not hand over directly to a new Chairman, as I had hoped. However, it was good that I was able to announce that we were in touch with an excellent candidate for the post, Anthony Burdall. I shall be recommending Anthony to my colleagues on the Committee in a few days' time as my successor, and I am confident that they will join me in welcoming him onto the Committee by co-option, pending his nomination for election at next year's AGM. Anthony is a Civil Engineer, now retired after 40 years' experience, mainly in the maritime field, and latterly as Chief Ports Engineer

with P&O. Since his retirement, Anthony has been actively involved with U3A and their Thames Valley Network, and he walks and sails regularly, amongst other interests. I warmly commend him to you as one well qualified to carry on the good work, and I'm sure that you will give him the same support that you have always given to me. I wish Anthony every success in this new challenge.

As you know, a new Ridgeway Partnership has been formed to take responsibility for The Ridgeway, and you will find a Report on this below. I have agreed to act as its first Chairman, and to see it properly established. I am pleased to be staying in touch with you and The Ridgeway in this new capacity. We have already recruited a first-class Ridgeway Officer, Sarah Wright, whose introduction also follows; and we are working on some exciting development ideas, based around the themes of the varied appeal of The Ridgeway to its users. I'm sure that Anthony and all my colleagues will keep you fully informed of these plans.

With all best wishes for the future

Ian Ritchie

Annual General Meeting, 2015

Held this year at The Vale & Downland Museum, Wantage, on Sunday, 26th April, this Meeting marked a significant turning point in our history. Besides the changes consequent on our joining the new Ridgeway Partnership, our long-serving Chairman, Ian Ritchie, would be standing down.



The weather had defied dire predictions and turned out fine and bright. The Museum was a new venue for us, and it provided an interesting and welcoming space, with refreshments on offer. The proceedings started with a detailed explanation by the Chairman of the Committee's decision to participate in the new Ridgeway Partnership and management arrangements. The Ridgeway and Thames Path Trails will be managed separately, and users and other key stakeholders will be represented alongside the AONBs and local authorities. A full-time Ridgeway Officer is being recruited, and Ian has accepted election as

the first Chairman of the new Partnership. A promotion and development strategy will seek to attract new users of the trail. The future role of the Association as a fund-raising body for the new Partnership found general support, and the Committee was encouraged to press ahead.

The formal AGM followed, with a quorum present, and last year's proceedings were ratified. Ian noted that he will continue to lead the discussions on The Great Stones Way. He thanked the Committee and other supporters for their efforts, with special mention of David Axford, who is standing down after 7 years' service. Ian presented David with a book as a small memento.

Our Treasurer, John Edgerton, presented the Accounts, with a good result largely due to generous donations by a member. With reserves now replenished we should be able to weather any leaner years. Proceeding to elections, the remaining officers and Trustees were unanimously returned, with three vacancies unfilled, including that of Chairman. Ian announced, however, that a very suitable candidate would be introduced to the Committee at its next meeting and recommended for co-option as acting Chairman, pending his election next year.

Our President, Lord Bradshaw, then spoke, noting that Ian's retirement is indeed the end of an era, and commending him for his tireless efforts. His success in obtaining the protection needed by The Ridgeway and other green lanes was an enormous achievement, on which the current campaign for further protective legislation will seek to build. Ian was then presented with a framed and mounted print of a painting of a Ridgeway scene at Avebury by Anna Dillon, subscribed for by many of the members. Ian responded thanking the contributors and all his past colleagues, and most specially his partner, Susan Suchopar. A bouquet of flowers was then presented to Susan, and photographs taken, amidst good wishes from all.



Anthony Burdall

As one door closes, another opens. Since retirement some years ago, I have been involved with various organisations and recently a couple of commitments have drawn to a close. I am honoured to be invited to put my name forward as Chairman of the Friends of the Ridgeway.



Married with four sons, we moved to Wiltshire from London as part of a corporate move. I vividly remember on the first day after we moved into our new home walking with the family on the Ridgeway at the Uffington White Horse and looking down on the Thames Valley and deciding this was better than London – it has been our home now for in excess of 30 years.

A civil engineer by profession, I have worked much of my life as a consulting engineer specialising in docks and harbours. Working life as an engineer led me to many different countries and regions, in several cases to live there for several years. This travel and overseas experience gives an appreciation of our own country and way of life.

Beyond family and engineering, Alcyone, my beloved yacht, occupies my time (like any good mistress!) along with U3A running Opera and Photographic Groups and walking the local paths.

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. I look forward to contributing to the Friends of the Ridgeway.



The Ridgeway Partnership

The new Ridgeway Partnership is now up and running, and is getting stuck in to the challenges of not only preserving and maintaining The Ridgeway as we like it, but of enhancing its appeal to new users. The formalities were completed at meetings on 27th March, when the old, joint Ridgeway and Thames Path group wound itself up, and the new Ridgeway Partnership came into being, adopting a Partnership Agreement, a Delivery Framework approved by Natural England and a Development and Promotion Strategy. Ian Ritchie was elected as Chairman, and recruitment set in hand for a Ridgeway Officer, leading to Sarah Wright's appointment. A formal launch took place at Nuffield Place on 19th June, when our President, Lord Bradshaw did the honours.



Sarah, as Ridgeway Officer, will be the main point of contact for the Trail, and she will be based mainly at the same Oxfordshire CC offices in Eynsham as the previous National Trails Team (NTT), also using facilities made available by the relevant Partners. The same NTT volunteers will continue to undertake maintenance, joined in future by Chiltern Society and perhaps

other volunteer resources. Users should see little change on the ground. However, plans are being discussed for ways in which public awareness of the ancient path can be raised, and new users attracted, of course with due caution and discretion. The Partnership plans to feature and enhance the natural environment of The Ridgeway, while improving access and community links, with improved facilities for sporting events. Programmes will also feature the heritage and creative aspects of The Ridgeway.

As we have previously noted, our membership of the new Partnership has important implications for us, and we hope to play a significant role in the new arrangements.

Jeff Goddard, Secretary

A new face to look out for on the Ridgeway

Introducing the new Ridgeway Officer, Sarah Wright

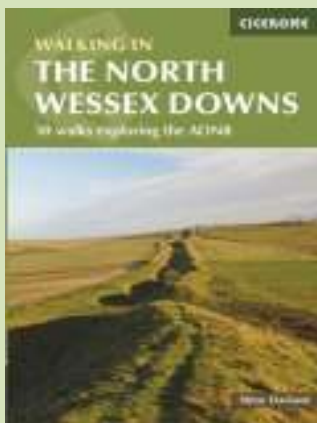
Do you think I'm lucky?! The Ridgeway Officer role involves spending time outside in attractive countryside, working with lovely people, helping the public enjoy themselves and developing new ideas to conserve a key part of our national heritage.....it certainly motivates me to get out of bed in the mornings!

Some of you may recognise me as I've been working in the countryside around the Ridgeway for many years now. I worked as a Rights of Way Officer for Buckinghamshire County Council, covering the Chilterns area. In those days, I would pass on any Ridgeway work to the National Trails team, thinking 'That was an easy way to reduce my workload'!

My work broadened when I joined the country's nature conservation agency Natural England in 2008. I worked with landowners of Sites of Special Scientific Interest and agri-environment scheme agreements in South Buckinghamshire and Berkshire. The Ridgeway will benefit from my first-hand experience of practical conservation of native species, habitats, historic features and landscape character. As the years passed, my role became more strategic. I became Natural England's representative to the Ridgeway's two AONBs (Chilterns and North Wessex Downs) and wrote publications about the evolution and management of the landscape along the length of the Ridgeway.

In the last two years, the Chilterns countryside and its people have become even more familiar to me as Project Officer for a Lottery-funded project about the native Box tree. Work I did to engage volunteers, develop learning resources for primary schools and run a varied events programme has given me good grounding to develop these areas for the Ridgeway.

First impressions in this new job is that the natural and cultural heritage of the Ridgeway is so incredibly rich that there is so much yet to be realised and conserved. And there is the added fortune of numerous people ready and willing to help me too, including the Friends most importantly! I look forward to making a positive difference and seeing you out there.



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.