

# The Friends of The Ridgeway

Autumn Newsletter, October, 2016



## From The Chairman

Dear Friends,

Writing this time last year, I commented within the context of the becoming your Chairman and learning about the Friends of the Ridgeway, that despite the success of the past, the Ridgeway remains under threat. My conclusion then was that *'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. This, I suggest, is the future role the Friends of the Ridgeway must play.'*



This conclusion remains as valid today as it was then.

Funding difficulties for the Ridgeway Partnership over the past year have been and remain a very big issue. They have the potential to threaten the future of the Ridgeway; it is clear that our role to protect the Ridgeway is very real. But to do this we must get more people involved.

Let me give a big "thank you" to all those of you who responded to my appeal in the Summer and did their bit to boost our membership, by contacting family, friends and acquaintances to persuade them to join us as members in our mission to preserve The Ridgeway. A very warm welcome too to our new members, of every category, and many thanks for your generosity and support.

While the numbers of new members so far have been limited, the recruitment drive must be a continuing process, and I hope that all of you will keep up the pressure and lose no opportunity to encourage others to join us. If you have not already approached as many of friends and acquaintances as you can, suggesting that they might like to support our work by becoming members, please do so. Our efforts to protect The Ridgeway against the lack of public support and other threats will be greatly strengthened if we can show that we speak for a substantial membership.

The Ridgeway and all our National Trails are under threat as never before, and we really need to mobilise everyone who values the unique Ridgeway environment to get behind our efforts and those of the Ridgeway Partnership.

Additionally I have another appeal to make to you, that is if anything more pressing. Like any supporters' Association, we depend on a small group of volunteers to be our eyes and ears and usually our voice. As officers and members of the Committee they help to monitor threats to The Ridgeway, initiate action on our behalf, husband our resources and keep the rest of us informed. They try to raise awareness of The Ridgeway and its universal value, and to work with others, most recently through the Ridgeway Partnership particularly, to mobilise support. This group is not permanent, and vacancies occur. We have for some time sought volunteers to handle our communications and publicity, and more recently our membership administration, so far without success. We need to recruit someone to run our new initiatives in the arts and creative fields. Our Secretary too will soon be stepping down which would reduce the group to a bare minimum of four Trustees against a full complement of eight. These vacancies reduce our effectiveness and could indeed pose an existential threat. The duties are not onerous, all at your own convenience, at home apart from our quarterly meetings. They demand no special skills beyond a modest competence, and they enable you to get really involved in preservation of the Ridgeway environment that means so much to us all.

I appeal to you all to either step forward yourself to join the group, or to persuade someone else you know who could make a contribution in this way. Please don't hesitate, just write to me, e-mail or telephone, and I'll be delighted to hear from you. (Anthony Burdall, 2 Fernham Road, Faringdon, SN7 7JY Tel: 01367 240713 Mob: 07841352938 Email: [anthony.burdall@burdall.net](mailto:anthony.burdall@burdall.net) )

With all best wishes

*Anthony Burdall*



## The Ridgeway Partnership

As our Chairman has noted, the Partnership has been wrestling with the pressures on public funding for maintenance of The Ridgeway and other National Trails. Although maintenance operations rely on generous volunteer efforts, the main source of finance to cover management and administration is an annual grant from Natural England (NE), originating with DEFRA, with lesser amounts from the local Councils. This year NE proposed to cut the grant for all the new National Trail Partnerships (NTPs), which has already been frozen for some years, by a further 50%. The NTPs, all set up just recently under NE's New Deal arrangements, regarded this as not only unfeasible at such short notice, but a breach of faith; and came together in opposition. Although NE has backed down on the 50% cut for the current year, they have made clear that cuts must be expected from next year onwards, and that NTPs must take steps to supplement public funding with self-generated finance. The Partnership has formed a fund-raising task-force and is getting to grips with the challenge, but the extent of the reductions next year, and in subsequent years, remain to be clarified.

However, it is clear that the NTPs will have to act together to defend their allocations, not only by lobbying but by presenting a convincing case for public support. It is now planned to form a new Association of NTPs for this purpose, and to develop a proper strategy for the future of National Trails, that has been lacking for some time. The adoption by the Ridgeway Partnership of its five themes - Ancient, Natural, Creative, Sporting and Living – for promotion and development fits neatly into this requirement, as it highlights the multi-faceted appeal of most if not all of the National Trails, and the contribution that they can make to national well-being, culture and economic growth through tourism. The vision for the Ridgeway as a bio-diversity corridor may be shared by other Trails and together they may offer the exciting prospect of an eco-network throughout much of the country.

Of course, the funding shortfall is very likely to inhibit progress on some at least of the development projects, while the Partnership struggles to bridge the gap in its core finance needs, before addressing match funding requirements. However, hopes remain high for the planned improvements in strategic access links in co-operation with Highways agencies and communities, and the continuing process of building contacts with other interested parties will strengthen the foundations for future projects.



One area of long-standing concern to us where progress seems at last to be possible is that of the Ridgeway within the Avebury and Stonehenge World Heritage Site. The Ridgeway here is a By-way Open to All Traffic, with vehicle traffic only controlled, by a seasonal Traffic

Regulation Order (TRO), during the winter months. As a result, there has been heavy rutting of the Trail, that is of concern not just to us but to the WHS authorities. A summary interim report on archaeology on the Ridgeway prepared for WHS by members of the Avebury and Stonehenge Archaeological and Historical Research Group (ASAHRG) has revealed damage to the underlying remains and recommended standards for repair and maintenance that may be inconsistent with continued motor vehicle access. The report calls for a holistic approach to byways within the WHS, and for consideration of a permanent TRO. We await further developments with interest.

Jeff Goddard

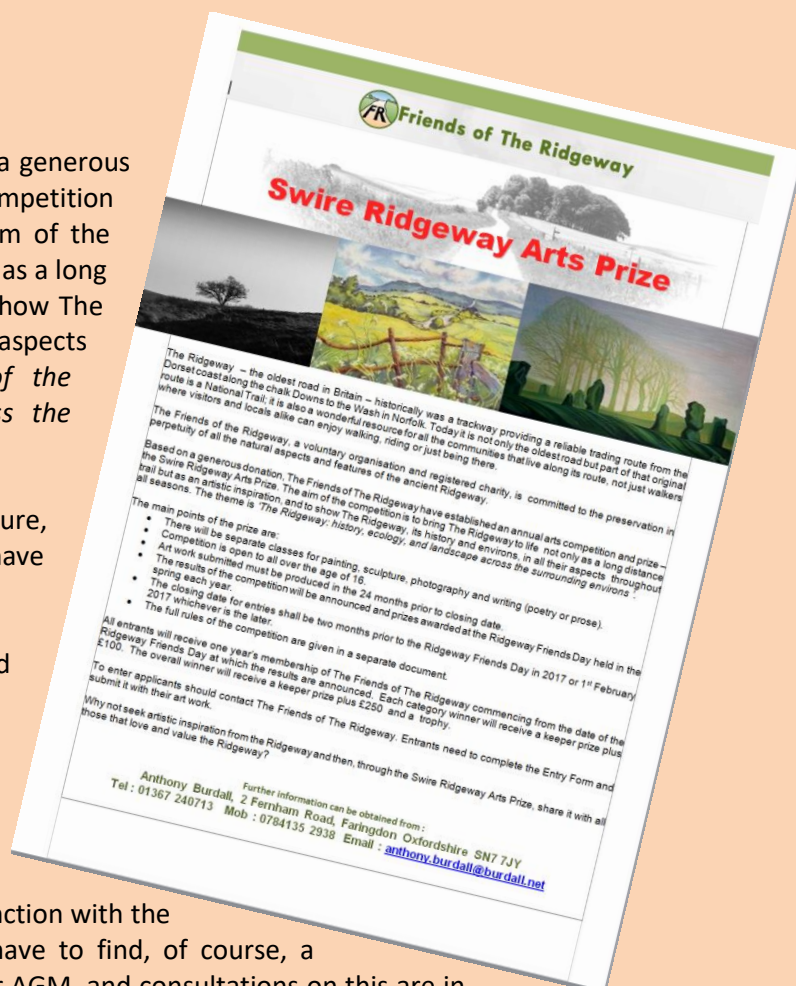


## The Swire Ridgeway Arts Prize

As announced at the AGM in April 2016, based on a generous donation, we have established an annual arts competition and prize – the Swire Ridgeway Arts Prize. The aim of the competition is to bring The Ridgeway to life not only as a long distance trail but as an artistic inspiration, and to show The Ridgeway, its history and environs, in all their aspects throughout all seasons. The theme is *'Spirit of the Ridgeway: history, ecology, and landscape across the surrounding environs'*.

There are separate classes for painting, sculpture, photography and writing (poetry or prose). Entries have to be submitted by Monday 27 February 2016.

The Rules and Entry Form have now been drafted and issued to over 100 organisations, Clubs and Societies. The Flyer was included in the mailing in July. We seem to have created some interest leading of course to interest in the Ridgeway and The Friends and hope for a significant entry.



The Prize Giving and Exhibition will be held in conjunction with the Annual General Meeting in April/May 2017. We have to find, of course, a convenient venue suitable for this, as well as for our AGM, and consultations on this are in progress. We have tentatively fixed the date of AGM and exhibition as Sunday, 30 April, but confirmation of this will of course depend on availability of our chosen venue. We shall aim to give advance notice of the AGM and exhibition date in our next Newsletter.

We are of course keen that the Prize should arouse as much interest as possible within the creative community, raising awareness of the Ridgeway, and of our efforts in support of its preservation, as well as stimulating the artistic efforts and inspiration of aspiring artists in all the media featured.



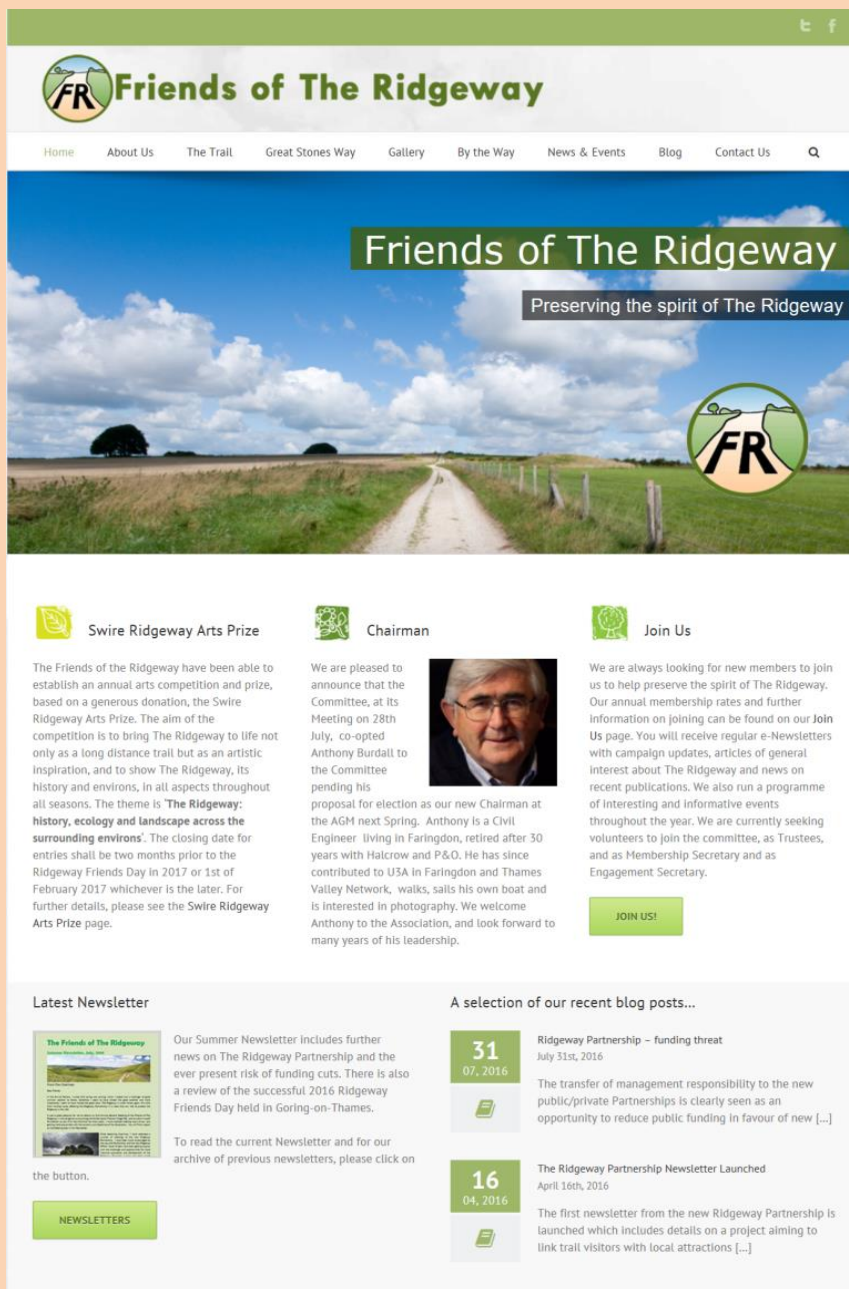
Images by courtesy of Anna Dillon

## FRIENDS OF THE RIDGEWAY WEB SITE

Have you looked at the web site recently? If you have, what do you think of it?

Comments that have come our way note that the site is a good looking, attractive site but is now out of date. We are embarked on a programme to update the site along with the Facebook and Twitter accounts. The 'Join Us' page has been revised, and will go live soon, to include the correct contact address and allow for Bacs electronic payments directly into our Bank Account; for those that wish to follow a traditional payment by cheque that option will continue alongside web based membership form and Bacs payment. Plans are also advanced to incorporate the Great Stones Way web site into our web site so that under The Trail menu tab will be full details of the greater Ridgeway. A link will be included to the National Trail web site for full details of the trail.

Do you have any comments on the web site? Are there features or information you would like to see incorporated?



The screenshot shows the homepage of the Friends of The Ridgeway website. The header features the organization's logo and name, followed by a navigation menu with links to Home, About Us, The Trail, Great Stones Way, Gallery, By the Way, News & Events, Blog, and Contact Us. The main banner image depicts a dirt path leading through a green field under a blue sky with clouds, with the text "Friends of The Ridgeway" and "Preserving the spirit of The Ridgeway" overlaid. Below the banner, there are three main sections: "Swire Ridgeway Arts Prize" with details about an annual arts competition, "Chairman" featuring a portrait of Anthony Burdall and his biography, and "Join Us" with information about membership and a "JOIN US!" button. At the bottom, there are two sections: "Latest Newsletter" with a preview of the Summer Newsletter and a "NEWSLETTERS" button, and "A selection of our recent blog posts..." featuring two posts with dates and brief descriptions.

**Friends of The Ridgeway**

Home About Us The Trail Great Stones Way Gallery By the Way News & Events Blog Contact Us

# Friends of The Ridgeway

Preserving the spirit of The Ridgeway

### Swire Ridgeway Arts Prize

The Friends of the Ridgeway have been able to establish an annual arts competition and prize, based on a generous donation, the Swire Ridgeway Arts Prize. The aim of the competition is to bring The Ridgeway to life not only as a long distance trail but as an artistic inspiration, and to show The Ridgeway, its history and environs, in all aspects throughout all seasons. The theme is **'The Ridgeway: history, ecology and landscape across the surrounding environs'**. The closing date for entries shall be two months prior to the Ridgeway Friends Day in 2017 or 1st of February 2017 whichever is the later. For further details, please see the [Swire Ridgeway Arts Prize page](#).

### Chairman

We are pleased to announce that the Committee, at its Meeting on 28th July, co-opted Anthony Burdall to the Committee pending his proposal for election as our new Chairman at the AGM next Spring. Anthony is a Civil Engineer living in Faringdon, retired after 30 years with Halcrow and P&O. He has since contributed to USA in Faringdon and Thames Valley Network, walks, sails his own boat and is interested in photography. We welcome Anthony to the Association, and look forward to many years of his leadership.

### Join Us

We are always looking for new members to join us to help preserve the spirit of The Ridgeway. Our annual membership rates and further information on joining can be found on our [Join Us](#) page. You will receive regular e-Newsletters with campaign updates, articles of general interest about The Ridgeway and news on recent publications. We also run a programme of interesting and informative events throughout the year. We are currently seeking volunteers to join the committee, as Trustees, and as Membership Secretary and as Engagement Secretary.

[JOIN US!](#)

#### Latest Newsletter

Our Summer Newsletter includes further news on The Ridgeway Partnership and the ever present risk of funding cuts. There is also a review of the successful 2016 Ridgeway Friends Day held in Goring-on-Thames.

To read the current Newsletter and for our archive of previous newsletters, please click on the button.

[NEWSLETTERS](#)

#### A selection of our recent blog posts...

**31**  
07, 2016  
Ridgeway Partnership – funding threat  
July 31st, 2016  
The transfer of management responsibility to the new public/private Partnerships is clearly seen as an opportunity to reduce public funding in favour of new [...]

**16**  
04, 2016  
The Ridgeway Partnership Newsletter Launched  
April 16th, 2016  
The first newsletter from the new Ridgeway Partnership is launched which includes details on a project aiming to link trail visitors with local attractions [...]



## The Vale of White Horse Local Group



The Friends of the Ridgeway Vale Of The White Horse Local Group have, for many years, organised a series of talks and events. Over the past summer these activities have included 'Sheepdrove Organic Farm : A walk with the Conservation Officer' and a 'Bishopstone Walk'. Over the autumn and winter, a programme of meetings with talks as in previous years is being finalised; the provisional programme is:

- Thursday 20 October: Alan Larkman *"Old-fashioned farming for conservation – first 5 years at City Farm, Eynsham"*.
- Thursday 17 November: Robin Buxton *"Is nature important in its own right, or only in the service of people?"*
- Thursday 19 January: Bjorn Watson *"Henry Merten, a Shrivenham Regicide"*.
- Thursday 17 February: Sarah Wright *"Future of the Ridgeway"*.
- Thursday 17 March: Eric Jones *"The Middle Ridgeway – History and environment"*.

All talks start at 7.30pm and are held in the Old Town Hall Faringdon, unless otherwise noted. The talks programme will be distributed to members of the Friends of the Ridgeway when it is finalised. For further information contact Joyce Gardiner Tel: 01367 710 743 Email: [joycegardner@hotmail.co.uk](mailto:joycegardner@hotmail.co.uk)

All are welcome to attend the meetings, to hear what promises to be interesting talks, and meet other members of the Friends of the Ridgeway. Guests welcome!

## Review: Middle Ridgeway

This new book on The Ridgeway between Avebury and Streatley offers a fresh perspective and new insights into this much-loved landscape. The title refers, I'm pleased to note, to the middle section of the whole ancient Ridgeway between East Anglia and Dorset, not the shorter National Trail. This is not just another guide-book with route descriptions and pretty photographs, but a serious and scholarly exploration of the distinctive ecology of the chalk escarpment, with reference to land use and natural history records over the last two hundred years.



The authors, Patrick Dillon and Eric Jones, both distinguished environmental historians who have an intimate understanding of the Ridgeway Country, set out to present an account of how the “ecological island” of the high chalk downs has been shaped by the interaction of land use patterns and the local ecology. Starting with the basic landform and earliest settlements they focus particularly on the influence on the landscape of agricultural prices and techniques, with the demand from the London market affecting the changing balance between plough and grassland, land ownership and occupation and the impact of country sports, specifically on

bird populations. The evolution of the local agricultural economy, with its crafts and local manufactures, the large-scale droving, markets and fairs, and the patterns of fields and enclosures are well explained and illuminated. While much of the analysis will be familiar in its broad outlines to many readers, there are many new insights and the narrative is well supported by quotations and references to a broad range of local historians and naturalists. The text is also brought to life by illustration by scenes of Ridgeway landmarks by artist Anna Dillon, Patrick's daughter, who is well known to many members.

Published by Wessex Books of Salisbury, the book is handsomely produced, and furnished with an excellent bibliography and biographical notes. This is definitely a book that repays a thorough reading and that should find a place on the shelves of anyone with an interest in the English countryside and its evolution, and in the Ridgeway in particular.

You can purchase your copy at the White Horse Book Shop in Marlborough, and other good shops, or by e-mail at [order@middle-ridgeway.co.uk](mailto:order@middle-ridgeway.co.uk). Price is £16.95 + £2.80 postage and packing.

