

# The Friends of The Ridgeway

## Spring Newsletter, February 2018



### From The Chairman

Dear Friends

This is my ninth Newsletter Chairman's Message, the third written in the cold of winter. And trying to keep warm, maybe 'The Polar Bear' from Hilaire Belloc's Cautionary Verses has a lesson for us:

"The polar bear is unaware  
Of cold that cuts me through:  
For why? He has a coat of hair  
I wish I had one too!"

From the fireside, reflecting on life and Ridgeway, I am looking forward to not only the spring weather but to interesting things to come for the Ridgeway. But first an apology – it was our intention to issue a Newsletter before Christmas, however events got in the way preventing such an issue.

The Friends of the Ridgeway was founded to '*preserve the ancient Ridgeway paths along the chalk downs of Southern England*' in particular from the ravages of motor vehicles, especially 4x4s off roading. As reported previously 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 one of the members of the group. Over the past year there has been four meetings and considerable email correspondence. On 21 November 2017 the NERC Select Committee of the House of Lords met to consider oral evidence about green lanes. Our President, Lord Bradshaw, attended on behalf of Friends of the Ridgeway. Subsequently Green Lanes Protection Group (GLGP) and the Green Lanes Environmental Action Movement (GLEAM) submit written evidence. Despite this activity, progress is very limited and realistically unlikely to lead to any further legislation or restrictions on motor vehicle use on green lanes. But we will continue to support the Working Group.





The preservation of the Ridgeway paths is not just a single issue. The Ridgeway Partnership still lacks financial stability, arousing concern about its long term maintenance commitments. And various development schemes that impact upon the Ridgeway continue to be promoted. Recent proposals include the Swindon New Eastern Villages/Southern Connector Road schemes but these projects do not appear to impact the Ridgeway.

The Plant Science Department of the University of Oxford has established an experimental study along the Ridgeway near Bury Down in West Berkshire, starting in October 2017. Trial plots will be created to test a few simple management approaches which could be used to restore verges of chalk grassland along the Ridgeway. An initial activity, carried out before the main research project, was a drone survey. Whilst funding was available for the main research programme match funding was required for the drone survey; the Friends of the Ridgeway provided that funding and consequentially have access to the drone images – some 20,000 images of the Ridgeway. A selection of these images will be presented to the October 2018 meeting of the Vale of the White Horse Group.

In the Autumn Newsletter we reported that we are exploring the establishment of a coast-to-coast route along existing Ridgeway tracks from Dorset to north Norfolk. It would be exciting to bring back to life the original function of these ancient tracks to establish a recreational route coast to coast. A Working Group, in conjunction with the Icknield Way Association, has been set up; its first objective with the objective of identifying a provisional route by the early summer. Then we can begin the walking of the possible route to check its suitability – if you would like to volunteer to check part of the route please do get in touch.

Following the success of the first event, there is another Swire Ridgeway Arts Prize competition this year with the Prize giving after our AGM, on Sunday 22 April 2018. The Art Exhibition will be the centre piece of the Ridgeway Friends Day on Sunday 22 April 2018 – definitely a date for your diary.

To help the Committee with our mission to preserve and promote the Ridgeway, we are delighted to welcome Alan Chater to join the committee and for election as a Trustee; background information on each is given below. However, we would welcome further committee members, particularly a Secretary.

Winter will soon be over and spring will be with us.

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 aim of the competition is to bring The Ridgeway to life not only as a long distance trail but also as an artistic inspiration, and to show The Ridgeway, its history and environs, in all their aspects throughout all seasons; the theme of the competition is *'Spirit of the Ridgeway'*.

The main points of the prize competition are:

- Separate classes for painting, sculpture (including ceramics and textiles) , photography and writing (poetry or prose);
- Competition is open to all, amateur and professional artists;
- Art work submitted must be produced in the 24 months prior to closing date;
- The closing date for entries is 22 March 2018. The results of the competition will be announced and prizes awarded on 22 April 2018;

All entrants receive one year's membership of The Friends of The Ridgeway; each category winner will receive a keeper prize plus £100. The overall winner will receive a keeper prize plus £250 and a trophy.

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 on 22 April 2018. There will be an exhibition of works submitted for the competition. It will be open to the public on Saturday 21 April and Sunday 22 April 2018 in the Thomas Hughes Memorial Hall, Uffington (Broad Street, Uffington, Oxfordshire, SN7 7RA), located in the centre of the beautiful and historic rural village of Uffington in the Vale of the White Horse.

A distinguished panel of volunteer judges have agreed to assess the entries, led by Dorothy Burrows, well known locally as Director of the Betjeman Festival.

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? Alternatively go along to the exhibition to see art which it is hoped will be as interesting and exciting as last year.

*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?*

Further information can be obtained from:

Anthony Burdall, 2 Fernham Road, Faringdon Oxfordshire SN7 7JY

Tel : 01367 240713 Mob : 0784135 2938 Email : [anthony.burdall@burdall.net](mailto:anthony.burdall@burdall.net)





### THE OLDEST ROAD

Put your ear to the ground and listen for the beat of ghostly feet — horn-hard, rag-clad, skin-wrapped, leather-shod, Vibramed heels and toes have stirred up this pale dust.

While the Thames still flowed into the Rhine and aurochs were flayed with stoneflake knives, their hunters trod this upland grass to white. Then ice arrived and cleared the Downs of man.

When Babylon was still a mighty city, voyagers from the east arrived, settled in wooded combes. They felled the forest to make space for maize and emmer wheat, to graze cattle, sheep.

Attuned to what we can no longer hear, they found sacred places, built homes from hazel and chalky daub, raised sarsen chambers for the burial of powerful dynasties.

Others came after: migrants, invaders, skilled in pottery, metalwork. Remnants of their forts still circle vantage points; their language echoes in names: Barbary, Wayland, Hackpen, Uffington.

Nomads, drovers, peddlers, farmers have, for millennia, found safety in its height. Now ramblers step out, unafraid, wind-buffed, rain-drenched, sun-warmed along this track through time.

*Gill Learner*



### Annual General Meeting, 2018 – Preliminary Notice

The AGM will take place on Sunday, 22nd April, 2018, in the Thomas Hughes Memorial Hall, Uffington, Oxfordshire, SN7 7RA, commencing at 3.00 pm. The AGM will be preceded by an Exhibition of entries for the Swire Ridgeway Arts Prize, open from Saturday 21 April, and the category and overall Prize winners will be announced at the meeting. Refreshments and light lunches will be available at the Hall from midday.

All Trustees are subject to election or re-election at the AGM. If you can volunteer your time and skills, and would like to contribute towards the objectives of the Association, please get in touch with the Secretary.

## Alan Chater

I am pleased to join the committee of the Friend of the Ridgeway and would like to introduce myself.

I am a retired Chartered Accountant. I have spent the bulk of my working life as a finance director in a variety of companies, ranging from big corporate entities to smaller private companies. I have worked in the UK and abroad, covering a broad spectrum- from multinational oil companies to marinas on the River Thames and the South Coast.



I have lived in Oxfordshire for over thirty years. I am a keen walker and have spent many a happy hour walking on the Ridgeway. My wife and I are currently doing a gentle walk along the Thames path.

Since retiring, I have developed an interest in archaeology and am particularly keen on the interpretation of the local landscape. I have done a number of field trips including site visits to the Ridgeway which has rekindled my interest in this ancient pathway!

Over the past 15 years I have also been involved in a number of charities - initially with a Commonwealth educational charity and latterly as a trustee and director of Cotswold Archaeology, a charity providing archaeology and heritage services and advancing the knowledge and education of archaeology.

This experience will, I hope, be of benefit to Friends of the Ridgeway.

*Alan Chater*

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## The Ridgeway Partnership – Up-Date

As noted in our last issue, Ian Ritchie is standing down at the end of March, 2018, as first Chairman of the Ridgeway Partnership, after seeing the new organisation through its conception, birth and the first three years of life. With the Partnership now well established, he has felt it time to step down. I also expect to hand over as minute-taker to another volunteer.

A successor to Ian as Chairman has been appointed, Simon Kearey, who will be attending his first meeting of the Partnership Board on 5th February. Simon is an accountant (FCCA) with a wide range of leadership experience from the BBC, Oxfordshire County Council, and currently the NHS. He has extensive interests in the voluntary sector, as Chair of school Governors, and Chair of a junior football club and of Wycombe Heritage and Arts Trust. He lives very close to The Ridgeway and he and his partner (who is a senior nurse at the John Radcliffe) go out walking on it frequently. He confesses to know The Chilterns far better than the North Wessex Downs, but expects that he will be retiring from his current employment before long and looks forward to walking more of The Ridgeway.



The Partnership is currently awaiting confirmation by Natural England of its grant funding for the 2018/19 financial year, but is on a stable financial footing, with supplementary funding from event organisers and donors, and for development projects picking up well. A major programme to develop strategic links is making good progress, and the first completed link was launched at Bishopstone with an event there on 24th November,

2017, attended amongst others by Anthony Burdall, our Chairman, and by Trustee Andy Greenhalgh as Chairman of Bishopstone Council.

*Jeff Goddard*



## The Great Chalk Way– Up-Date

Our last issue reported on our initial meeting with our friends in the Icknield Way Association and agreement with them and the Ridgeway Partnership to explore the potential for a new recreational walking route across the country from Dorset to the Wash, following the ancient braided paths, and on The Great Chalk Way as the name for it. Since then the relevant web addresses have been registered and a number of route alternatives considered. A second meeting of the working group took place in January, in conjunction with a session of the Partnership Development Group, and the focus on preparing a route map was confirmed, to be followed by a draft concept document, as we shall need both of these before we can sensibly approach the legion of people and organisations likely to be concerned. However attractive the idea, putting it into practice will be a long process!

*Jeff Goddard*



*..... and finally*



On Tuesday 30 January ITV broadcast 'Britain's Favourite Walks : Top 100' introduced by Julia Bradbury and Ore Oduba; but it is available on ITV player. Many National Trails failed to make it into the top 100. The Ridgeway was voted in at 46, several places ahead of the Thames Path.