



The Friends of The Ridgeway

*Preserving the Spirit
of The Ridgeway*



Annual Report 2016

About Us:

Our Mission:

- To **preserve** The Ridgeway as a unique environment;
- To **enable** quiet enjoyment of its many special features;
- To **promote** greater awareness of its value to the whole community.

Our Aims: The preservation of The Ridgeway, securing quiet enjoyment of its essential atmosphere and environment, and its many special features. Our aspiration is for the whole of the ancient Ridgeway, from coast to coast, to be recognised, valued, protected and promoted as a pre-eminent facility for walkers and other users.

Our Vision for The Ridgeway:

- A special environment whose landscape, history and wildlife are fully appreciated by the local and wider communities;
- A place where people can exercise, enjoy their special interests and a memorable day out, respecting the Countryside Code;
- Properly maintained, with excellent access, signage, facilities and information, not over-used or abused, benefiting everyone.

Our Role: To campaign for the protection of The Ridgeway, working with the Ridgeway Partnership and others to promote its value to the whole community as an essential part of everyone's life and heritage; and to represent any concerns about The Ridgeway to those responsible for its maintenance.

We seek to engage people living near to and using The Ridgeway in activities that spread knowledge and appreciation of its historic, artistic and environmental features.

We will participate in and work with the Ridgeway Partnership and other relevant organisations to develop The Ridgeway as a vital part of the National Trail network.



From the Chairman

Dear Friends,

Dear Friends,

This time last year, in my first Chairman's letter, I noted that *"Spring is coming – snowdrops have been in flower for some time and daffodils are appearing, no doubt to put on their usual spring show before the AGM."* Since that time, as the seasons came and went, issues relating to the Ridgeway have come and gone, some threatening the trail, some offering hope in new activities.



This year then, my first full year in post, has been a busy and informative one for me, as I get to grips with all the challenges confronting us in ensuring the proper preservation and promotion of the Ridgeway. This task now involves working within the Ridgeway Partnership as well as on our independent efforts and concerns.

As your representative on the Partnership, I have engaged fully with all our colleague agencies, and tried with them to address the increasing financial challenges as the Natural England grants for National Trails come under question. I welcome moves for the National Trails to work in alliance to protect their position. I am relieved to report that the grant for the Ridgeway for 2017/18 has now been confirmed at the same level as last year, but the

reducing trend will continue. Trails will have to seek resources elsewhere, increasing revenue from sponsorship, donations or commercial activities, and seeking grants for new projects such as the plan to improve strategic access routes to the Ridgeway from local communities. The Partnership has set up a new Fundraising Group that I have joined. One contribution by the Friends is to agree a process whereby we may receive donations sourced by the Partnership and apply them, at our discretion, for the benefit of the Ridgeway. Your Secretary and I also attend the Partnership's Promotion and Development Group, for which we are pursuing the Creative appeal of the Ridgeway.

Representing the Friends of the Ridgeway, I was invited to join the Motoring Stakeholder Working Group initiated by Natural England, to meet with other stakeholders of the National Trails to debate issues associated with motor vehicles on byways. Whilst the Ridgeway is largely protected – and there may be some more good news in due course – damage to the trails by motor cycles and 4X4s continues. The Department of the Environment has made it clear that for several years there will be no new legislation. However, the Group has been set the task of trying to establish some sort of guidance or code of good practice that can be used in establishing local agreements. I have to say that the two sides hold very established views and any joint guidance seems a long way off; reporting back after the first meeting I commented that it was like the battle between the Capulets and Montagues. Maybe it is a case of better to travel hopefully than arrive.

Within our own Association I have been pleased to meet as many of you as possible, particularly in the forum of the Vale of White Horse Local Group, whose excellent events I have regularly



attended – and recommend. I do hope that members in other areas may wish to follow their example, and form Local Groups. We would be pleased to support such initiatives. I have also sought to energise our member



recruitment efforts. Although our mail-shot to members this year has so far had limited results it is important for this work to continue. We need to engage with both the long-term and new residents near the

Ridgeway, and to make them aware both of the attractions of the Ridgeway and its environment and of the need to protect it. We also now urgently need a new team to join me on the Committee and to take our efforts forward. Our effectiveness is increasingly threatened by the lack of volunteers for this important work, and I hope that anyone who can spare some time will put their names forward.

Our major new initiative this year has been the launch of the Swire Ridgeway Art Prize, funded by a generous gift by a member and long-standing supporter. The entries will be exhibited in the Thomas Hughes Memorial Hall, Uffington, over the weekend of 22-23 April, 2017, prior to the awards and our Annual General Meeting. I do hope that as many members as possible will come along to visit the exhibition and attend the meeting.

Anthony Burdall



The Ancient Ridgeway: An ancient trade route, perhaps our oldest road, dating back 4,000 years at least to the civilisation that built Avebury and Stonehenge, the ancient Ridgeway follows the edge of the chalk escarpment across the South of England, from The Wash to the coast of Dorset. Coupled with the Icknield Way lower down the slope, just above the spring line, the well-drained and lightly wooded track, above the marshes and thick woods of the Vales, linked Seahenge and Grimes Graves in Norfolk, to Avebury and Stonehenge. Burial mounds and hill-forts, and hill figures carved in the chalky



turf, may be traced along the route, and armies have marched and fought along it. Its powerful atmosphere and its glorious countryside still today inspires and stimulates artistic creativity.

The Ridgeway National Trail: It was only natural that, when the National Trails were established after World War II, The Ridgeway should take its place amongst these premier routes. Only the central section of 87 miles between Ivinghoe Beacon in Buckinghamshire and Overton Hill near Avebury in Wiltshire has yet been so designated. However, this section of The Ridgeway brings together the best of the Chilterns and the North Wessex Downs, joined by the picturesque Thames Valley. Virtually the whole route is within either the Chilterns or the North Wessex Downs Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONBs).

The Ridgeway today provides an wonderful experience not only for walkers and local residents, but for visitors and families seeking the best of rural England. South of the river lies the classic, high, down-land track, with its massive views above the Vale of White Horse, and to the north the woods and vales of the Chiltern hills harbour pretty villages and welcoming pubs and restaurants.

The Ridgeway Partnership

The Ridgeway Partnership, established in 2015 as one of the new family of National Trail Partnerships instigated by Natural England, has taken on responsibility for the management, promotion and improvement of the Ridgeway National Trail. The Ridgeway Partnership brings together the local authorities along the route, the Chilterns and North Wessex Downs AONBs, the Ramblers, Chiltern Society, and other stakeholder representatives. The Friends of The Ridgeway is a founding Partner, and played a significant



role in setting up the Partnership. Oxfordshire County Council, as Lead Partner, holds funds and accounts, hosts a Ridgeway Officer, Sarah Wright, and other part-time staff, and supports the corps of dedicated volunteers who, assisted by Chiltern Society teams, carry out the regular maintenance needed to ensure the high standards required of National Trails. Natural England provides a grant towards core costs, alongside lesser amounts from local authorities, and co-ordinates the National Trails network as a whole.

The Ridgeway Partnership seeks to work closely with landowners and local communities in order both to ensure high standards of maintenance of the Ridgeway as an important recreational and leisure facility for a wide variety of users, and to raise awareness of its unique heritage and environmental





characteristics. The Ridgeway has considerable potential to increase economic benefits from tourism, to improve physical and mental health, and to provide inspiration for creative activity in many fields. The Partnership has identified five themes for the promotion and enhancement of The Ridgeway, building on aspects of its unique appeal. These themes, listed as the Natural, Living, Ancient, Sporting and Creative Ridgeway, will highlight its wild-life and bio-diversity; the superb landscape and scenery; good food, country pubs and services; sporting events and family

recreation; its wealth of heritage and pre-history; and its role as an inspiration for art and literature, or just peace and quiet.

A major initiative during 2017/18 will be the launch of a plan to improve a number of strategic access routes between local communities and the Ridgeway, providing clearer signage, better surfaces, easier accessibility and improved information, encouraging residents to make more use of the Ridgeway, and Trail users to benefit from local services and attractions. Other improvements will see development of the National Trails web-site and availability of mobile phone applications to offer more information on the route and services.

The need for economies in public services generally is having an increasing effect on the Ridgeway and the National Trails network as a whole, as core grants are reduced or remain static. National Trails Partnerships, the Ridgeway amongst them, will in future need to mobilise new resources in order to fund new initiatives and promotions, and to ensure that high standards of management are maintained.

The Swire Ridgeway Arts Prize



Artist Anna Dillon



With the help of a munificent donation from a generous supporter, the Committee has been able to implement a long-standing ambition to launch an Arts Competition and Prize, celebrating the creative and artistic inspiration of the Ridgeway. It is hoped that, if shown to meet a need, the competition will be repeated annually. Separate classes are open to works of painting, photography, sculpture and writing (poetry or prose). Prizes will be awarded for each category as well as to an overall winner, each winner receiving a cash sum and a keeper prize. Worthy entries will be displayed at an Exhibition over the weekend of the Ridgeway Friends Day and Annual General Meeting. This year's event will be held in the Thomas Hughes Memorial Hall in Uffington, over the week-end of 22nd and 23rd April., 2017. The Exhibition will be open to the public between 10.00 am and 5.00 pm each day, and the Prizes will be awarded at 3:30 pm on Sunday 23rd April.



Artist Gus Mills



NOTICE OF THE 2016 ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

**To be held at the Thomas Hughes Memorial Hall, Uffington,
on Sunday, 23rd April, 2017, at 3.00 pm.**

Tea will be served following the conclusion of the Meeting.

The winners of the Swire Ridgeway Arts Prizes will be announced and the Prizes awarded at 3:30 pm. Entries to the competition will be on display in the Hall, and light lunches may be purchased there from 12.00 pm.

Nominations for the election of Officers and Trustees should be given in writing or by e-mail to the Secretary by 14 days before the Meeting, ie, by 8th April, 2017. Members are urged to volunteer for the several vacancies to ensure that the Association's work can continue uninterrupted.

How You Can Help:

Join Us: Become a member of The Friends of The Ridgeway. Just ask one of us for a leaflet and application form, download a form from our website or e-mail one of the Committee.

Volunteer: We're always looking for helpers. Right now we're seeking new Trustees, and the Ridgeway Partnership needs volunteers to help with maintenance and development works.

Report Abuse: Driving a 4x4 vehicle or trail-bike on the Restricted Byway sections of The Ridgeway causes damage to the surface, can harm and annoy walkers and is an offence. Please report it to the police! Fly-tipping or just leaving litter is anti-social and spoils the environment. Report it to your local Council, or let us know about it, and we'll get it collected.

The Friends of The Ridgeway: The Facts

The Friends of The Ridgeway is a voluntary association, founded in 1983, and now a registered charity, no 1107926.

The President and Vice-Presidents: Our current President is Lord Bradshaw. Our seven Vice-Presidents are all Members of Parliament whose constituencies include sections of The Ridgeway.

Volunteer Committee: The Trustees of The Friends of The Ridgeway, elected annually to run the Association, comprise an Executive Committee, which normally meets quarterly, and is supported by other volunteers, including our valued Planning Adviser. The Committee, listed on the back cover, includes the Chairman, Secretary and Treasurer. We are currently seeking to recruit a new Secretary, Treasurer, and new Trustees with special responsibility for Membership, Communications and Engagement with the local community and other organisations. Trustees also represent their local areas. Anyone able to help is encouraged to apply to the Secretary.

Meetings: The Association meets in Annual General Meetings of members, at which Officers and Trustees are elected, and the Annual Accounts and Trustees' Report are considered and approved. The Accounts, prepared by the Treasurer, are scrutinised by an Independent Examiner and reported to the Charities Commission. Our Annual General Meeting will be held this year in the Thomas Hughes Memorial Hall in Uffington, on Sunday, 23rd April, 2017, at 3.00pm.

Activities: Our initial task was to challenge the damage being done by cross-country vehicles to The Ridgeway and other green paths, and to campaign for control of the abuse by restricting access. This was largely achieved by the 2006 Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act (NERCA), and the application of Restricted Byway status to most of The Ridgeway National Trail south of the Thames. We continue to press for the remaining sections in Wiltshire to be so classified.

The Swire Ridgeway Arts Prize: We have launched this year a competition celebrating the Ridgeway as a creative inspiration for artists. An Exhibition of entries and the Prize awards will be held during the course of a Ridgeway Friends Day in April 2017. Details are given above.

The Ridgeway National Trail: The National Trail network is overseen for Government by Natural England, which provides grants for maintenance, and for a National Trails web-site and other promotion. Following a Review, a new Ridgeway Partnership was formed from March 2015, with Oxfordshire

County Council as the Lead Partner, to take responsibility for its operations. A dedicated Ridgeway Officer has been appointed. We have as a founder member engaged fully with this new Partnership, and will continue to work closely with it.

The Great Stones Way: In pursuance of our aspiration to re-create the ancient Ridgeway from coast to coast, the Association proposed The Great Stones Way, as an extension of The Ridgeway southwards to Old Sarum, over existing rights of way linking Avebury and Stonehenge. We have been unable to complete way-marking through the Vale of Pewsey due to local opposition. However, a Guide-book has been published by Cicerone, and we are encouraging formation of a local group to assume responsibility for its future development and promotion.

Future Concerns: We shall campaign to make sure that the Ridgeway Partnership has the resources of staff and funding to operate effectively, and to maintain, enhance and promote The Ridgeway. We shall continue to report damage and misuse of the Trail, and to press for reinstatement. We shall work with the new Partnership and our Planning Adviser to review planning applications affecting The Ridgeway, and oppose development proposals likely to damage its unique environment.

Local Groups: We encourage the formation of local groups of our members within communities, undertaking activities and events of interest to residents, and relevant to The Ridgeway and its environment. The first such group in The Vale of White Horse has blazed a trail and we hope that it will be followed by others all along the line of The Ridgeway.



Communications: We operate an informative web-site, www.ridgewayfriends.org.uk, which is available to promote our own activities and those of our many associate organisations. We publish a quarterly Newsletter, now, in the face of escalating postal costs, in an electronic format. We are also making efforts to develop our presence in social media; follow us on Twitter.

The Friends of The Ridgeway

Treasurer's Report for the Year to 31 December, 2017

- 1 Financial balances:** The financial balances for the year ending 31 December 2016 were:

CAF Bank a/c 00024957:	£16,173
Lloyds Bank a/c 01340366:	£21
COIF Investment a/c 006840001C	£9,672
Total funds available:	£25,866

The Funds allocated to GSW remain static at £4,194, with no further expenditure in the year. A donation of £2,000 was received for the express purposes of the Ridgeway Partnership.

- 2 Independent examination of the 2016 accounts:**

The accounts have been examined, as in previous years, by Steve Sherman and I am pleased to report that he has given them a clean bill of health. Copies of the signed accounts have been lodged with the Charities Commission.

- 3 Membership subscriptions:** The number of membership payments continuing to come in via our Lloyds Bank account has reduced significantly, due to a number of reminders being sent, asking them to switch their standing orders into our CAF account (from £650 last year to £200 this year). The Lloyds account will remain open however, until we can get all standing orders switched to CAF. A total of £2,453 was received for subscriptions and £4,159 for donations (including the £2,000 for Ridgeway Partnership purposes). At 31 December our membership numbers were 160 paid and 282 Life Members – 442 in all.

- 4 Gift Aid:** The amount to be claimed from HMRC was £586 and was paid over in January.

- 5 General:** It has been another good year financially for the Friends. Finances are now back on a firm footing but the main emphasis, as witnessed by the membership drive during the latter part of the year, is on numbers. Unfortunately, the membership drive has so far only resulted in 16 new memberships.

Our website now contains a membership application form, which can be downloaded and printed for posting to us, or it can be completed online and emailed to us. We have a new webmaster, Ricky Cunningham, who is concentrating on improving the website in order to make it more informative and customer friendly.

John Edgerton

Treasurer, The Friends of The Ridgeway

March 2017

The Friends of The Ridgeway

Income & Expenditure Account for the Year to 31 December, 2016

INCOME	2016 £	Notes	2015 £
Subscriptions	2,453		2,173
Donations	4,159	1	10,702
Sale of cards (nett)	0		100
Interest - COIF Funds	43		43
Gift Aid tax recovered	587	2	325
Miscellaneous	36	3	25
	7,278		13,368
EXPENDITURE			
Newsletters/Annual Report	2,630		1,242
Meetings expenses	477		753
Insurance	323		309
Website admin	189		205
Office costs/leaflets	133		318
Local & group events	110		285
Affiliation fees	87		66
Greeting cards at cost	58		40
AGM expenses	33		60
Sundries	10		10
	4,050		3,248
Surplus for year	3,228		10,120
Fund Balance b/f	23,225		13,105
Fund Balance c/f	26,453		23,225

The Friends of The Ridgeway

Statement of Assets & Liabilities for the Year to 31 December, 2016

CURRENT ASSETS	2016	2015
	£	£
Bank balances: Lloyds	21	172
CAF Bank Current a/c	16,173	12,905
COIF Deposit a/c	9,672	9,630
	25,866	22,707
Gift aid Recovery	587	460
Stock of cards	0	58
	26,453	23,225
REPRESENTED BY FUNDS:		
Restricted - Great Stones Way	4,194	4,194
Restricted - Ridgeway Partnership	7,000	5,000
Unrestricted - General Fund	15,259	14,031
	26,453	23,225

Notes

- 1 Further Charitable Donation £2,000 for purposes of Ridgeway Partnership
- 2 Gift Aid Claim submitted to HMRC for year 2016
- 3 Refund of an overpaid subscription
- 4 Stock of cards depleted to zero as part of Membership drive

Approved by the Trustees on 13 January, 2017, and signed on their behalf by:

J Edgerton

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John Edgerton

Hon. Treasurer

The Friends of The Ridgeway



Patron: Sir Chris Bonington
President: Lord Bradshaw
Vice-Presidents: Richard Benyon MP
Robert Buckland MP
David Gauke MP
John Howell MP
David Lidington MP
Claire Perry MP
Ed Vaizey MP

Trustees:

Anthony Burdall: (Chairman): anthony.burdall@burdall.net
Jeffrey Goddard: (Secretary, and Thames Valley): jeffgod69@gmail.com
John Edgerton (Treasurer, and Swindon): jedgerton1@virginmedia.com
Sally Barnes (VWH): sallybarnes100@goolemail.com
James Gunter (North Wilts): jagunter@btopenworld.com

Web-site: www.ridgewayfriends.org.uk;

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