

The Friends of The Ridgeway

Preserving the Spirit

of The Ridgeway



Annual Report, 2014



From The Chairman

Dear Friends,

It has been another very busy and successful year for us, mainly working to help establish the new Ridgeway Partnership. This body will take over the management, development and promotion of The Ridgeway from the beginning of April and we see this as a big step forward in the right direction. A full article appears below and when you have read it I am sure you will agree with me that it heralds a much brighter future for our beloved Trail. We can justifiably claim to have led the initiative, with our Secretary, Jeff Goddard, producing the vital (and voluminous) documentation required by Natural England, and I have chaired the Shadow Partnership body, preparing everything for the incorporation of the full new Partnership from April. The establishment of the Partnership has some important implications for our Association, and I will address these at our AGM. I hope our recommendations will meet with your approval.

With the inception of the new Partnership we have decided not to hold our traditional Ridgeway Day event this year, but instead to tie in with the official launch of the Partnership. This will be held in later June at Nuffield Place, a magnificent National Trust property just off the Wallingford to Henley-on-Thames main road. We will publish further details of the event as soon as we know them.

On our long battle to rid The Ridgeway of recreational motor vehicles, there are a couple of hopeful developments. The worst section of the Trail in terms of damage is, ironically, within the Avebury section of the Avebury and Stonehenge World Heritage Site (WHS). At last there seems to be some momentum building for the WHS management to address the issue, and we are very much involved in the discussions. In addition, as part of a Bill currently going through Parliament, the government is establishing a Working Group to examine the impact of off-road vehicles on green lanes in the country generally and specifically in National Parks and on National Trails. Our views will be represented on the Working Group, which has to report within eighteen months. I hope my optimism is well placed.

I would like to formally record my thanks to our Membership Secretary, Sally Barnes, our Treasurer, John Edgerton, and our Secretary, Jeff Goddard, for all their hard work throughout the year and for the personal support they have given me.

Finally, it is both a sad and a proud time for me as I write this letter. Sad because I stand down as your Chairman at the time of our Annual General Meeting in April, but proud when I reflect on what we have achieved in the 15 years I have been Chairman. I have been honoured to have served you for so long and I have enjoyed it enormously. I hope to see as many of you as possible at our AGM at the Vale and Downland Museum in Wantage on Sunday 26 April – full details below.

Very best wishes

Ian Ritchie, Chairman

About Us:

Our Mission: *“For a better Ridgeway”*

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 Role : To promote the protection of The Ridgeway as a unique environment, and in particular to participate in and work with the Ridgeway Partnership and others to secure the quiet enjoyment of the many special features of the National Trail, and to develop it as a vital part of the Trail network.

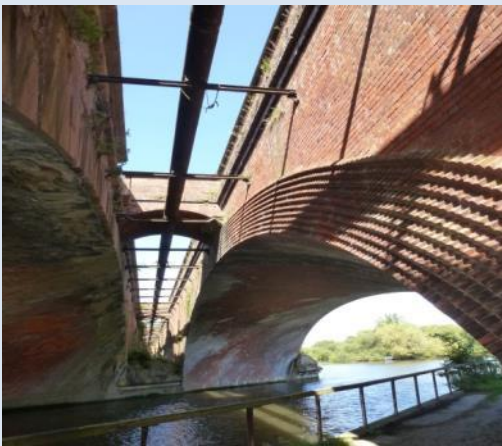
Our Aims: We believe that The Ridgeway is best preserved by being valued by the local community as an essential part of everyone’s life and heritage. Our aims are to engage people living near to and using The Ridgeway in activities that spread knowledge about its historic, artistic and environmental features, and to represent their concerns about The Ridgeway to those responsible for its maintenance.



The Ridgeway: An ancient trade route, perhaps our oldest road, it dates back 4,000 years at least to the civilisation that built Avebury and Stonehenge. Coupled with the Icknield Way, it follows the edge of the chalk escarpment across the South of England, from The Wash to the coast of Dorset. The central section, between Avebury and Ivinghoe Beacon near Dunstable, has been a National Trail since 1972.

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 Vision places the existing Ridgeway in its context as part of the greater network of National Trails. We will participate in and work with the Ridgeway Partnership and other management groups to enable the quiet enjoyment of The Ridgeway's many special features; and develop it as a vital part of the National Trail network. At the same time, we

will act as responsible members of the Partnership in respecting the interests of other members and seeking common solutions.

Our aspiration is for the whole of the ancient Ridgeway, from coast to coast, to be recognised, protected and promoted as the wonderful route that it could be for walkers and other users; and we shall continue to work with our colleagues in the Icknield Way Association to this end.

The Friends of The Ridgeway:

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 a small group of other volunteers. The Committee, listed on the back cover, includes the Chairman, Secretary, Treasurer and Membership Secretary, and our valued volunteer helpers include a Planning Adviser. Trustees also represent their local areas. We are currently seeking to recruit a new Chairman, and are also seeking a Communications Secretary and an Engagement Secretary to develop our community and other relationships; anyone able to help is encouraged to apply to the Secretary.

Meetings: The Association meets in Annual General Meeting 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.

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 south of the Thames. We continue to press for the remaining sections in Wiltshire to be so classified.

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 has been formed this year to take responsibility for its operations. We have joined this new Partnership, and look forward to a full engagement with it.

Future Concerns: We shall work 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.

Events: Our Annual General Meeting will be held this year on 26th April, 2015, at the Vale & Downland Museum in Wantage, commencing at 1.30 pm. This will be an important Meeting for the Association, and we hope that as many Members as possible will attend.

The Ridgeway Partnership

The Ridgeway path is older than our history. Worn by the feet of pre-historic man, it extends from our earliest North Sea havens on the shores of the Wash, across the country to the harbours of the Dorset coast. Hand in hand with the Icknield Way it follows the edge of the chalk escarpment from Seahenge and Grimes Graves in Norfolk to Avebury, and onwards to Stonehenge. It links ancient burial mounds and hill-forts, and the oldest White Horse hill figure, and was the scene for half-forgotten battles that moulded our civilisation. It is there at the edge of our consciousness as a part of our heritage, and still today it casts a spell and holds a powerful atmosphere.



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. However, it was 1972 before it did so, and only the central section of 87 miles between Ivinghoe Beacon in Buckinghamshire to Overton Hill near Avebury in Wiltshire that could then be designated. This section of The Ridgeway brings together in one Trail, the best of the Chilterns and the Downs, linked by a peaceful stretch along the Thames. South of the river lies the classic, high, downland 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.

For some years The Ridgeway and the other National Trails have been supported by Natural England (NE), the agency responsible for our landscapes, working through the local authorities and Highways



© Countryside Agency - Photographer Ann Seth

Agencies responsible for all rights of way. A small team of staff, based with Oxfordshire CC (OCC), co-ordinates the work of many volunteers to maintain The Ridgeway and the Thames Path.

The Ridgeway has always been a valued facility for the many walkers, riders and cyclists seeking enjoyment of the scenic landscapes through which it runs. Virtually the whole route is within either the Chilterns or the North Wessex Downs Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONBs). The economic benefits from tourism and recreation are substantial but not often recognised. Recently, however, austerity has constrained NE's efforts to promote the National Trails, so that usage generally has fallen short of its potential; and The Ridgeway has been no exception. Now, NE has decided to delegate responsibility for management of the Trails to new Partnerships, involving organisations that represent the interests of many of those with a stake in each of the Trails, as well as the authorities responsible for its provision.

The new Ridgeway Partnership will take over, from 1st April, 2015, responsibility for the management, improvement and promotion of The Ridgeway National Trail. The Partners include all the local authorities along the route, both AONBs, the Chiltern Society, the Ramblers, the National Trust, British Horse Society, the Country Landowners Association, The Friends of The Ridgeway and more. OCC is the Lead Partner, and will continue to host staff and support the volunteers who will continue to maintain the high standards expected for the Trail. It is hoped that Chiltern Society and Ramblers volunteers may also be able to help with maintenance and development work. A new Ridgeway Officer is being recruited to provide overall co-ordination and a single point of contact for users.

The new Partnership will promote the many-layered appeal of The Ridgeway and will aim to improve links with other nearby attractions.



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The Trail is known already for its superb landscape and scenery, heritage and pre-history, good food and country pubs. Visitors can also explore wild-life and bio-diversity, engage in sport and

family recreation, and seek inspiration for art and literature, or just peace and quiet. There are also ambitious plans to improve access to The Ridgeway from villages along the route, for both locals and visitors, and particularly for the less abled. Improved access linked to public transport will provide extra custom for pubs and tea-shops. The Partnership aims to make the whole community more aware of this unique asset and to engage everyone in enjoying its attractions and in benefiting from the business that it can bring in.

A new Ridgeway Forum will be set up as a means towards two-way communication with interested individuals and organisations, exchanging information, feed-back and ideas, and opening up new initiatives for debate and criticism. The hope is that by mobilising the energies and ideas of the people who actually use and value The Ridgeway and its corridor, its potential can be enhanced and new private sector resources invested in its improvement. The Partners are looking for people to get actively involved and to volunteer their time and ideas to support this great local and national facility.

A public event is planned to inform everyone about the formation of the new Partnership, to be held in later June at Nuffield Place in the Chilterns, a National Trust managed property a stone's throw from The Ridgeway. This should be a great opportunity for everyone to find out about this exciting new initiative and to meet those involved.



The Great Stones Way:

The Association has for some years been seeking to develop The Great Stones Way, a recreational walking route southwards along The Ridgeway to Old Sarum, linking Avebury and Stonehenge. The project reflects our long-term aim to re-create the ancient Ridgeway from coast to coast.



We commissioned feasibility and environmental impact studies and mobilised European and other grant funding for the project to supplement money donated by our members, and used some of the funds to improve the new route

through the Avon Valley.

Unfortunately, some residents mainly in the Vale of Pewsey opposed the project, resulting in the loss of official backing and grants, so that the improvements could not be completed as planned. However, the route, being over existing rights of way, is open to users and a Guide-book to the route has been published.

For the future, we plan to hand over responsibility for the route to a local group, in the context of moves to develop economic opportunities in the area. The Great Stones Way is increasingly recognised as an attractive and feasible walking route, with considerable potential for development.

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.

NOTICE OF THE 2014 ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

To be held at The Vale and Downland Museum, Wantage,

On Sunday, 26th April, 2015, from 1.30 pm

Nominations for election of Trustees should be given in writing to the Secretary by 14 days before the meeting, ie by 12th April, 2015.

The Friends of The Ridgeway

Income and Expenditure Account for the Year to 31 December 2014

INCOME	2014	2013
	£	£
Subscriptions	2050	1871
Donations	5355	39
Sales of Greetings Cards (net)	79	324
Sales of GSW guidebooks	6	-
Talks	-	25
Advertisement	-	50
Bank Interest COIF Charity Funds	41	51
Tax recovered by Gift Aid	<u>283</u>	<u>340</u>
	<u>7814</u>	<u>2700</u>
EXPENDITURE		
Newsletters/Annual Report	2027	1803
Office costs/leaflets	341	347
Affiliation fees	34	49
AGM expenses	350	145
Website	726	525
Insurance	290	290
Local/group events	160	199
Meeting expenses	514	378
Sundry expenses	9	100
Great Stones Way project	1667	287
Equipment (projector 50/50 with GSW)	112	-
	<u>6230</u>	<u>4123</u>
Surplus/(Deficit) for the year	1584	(1423)
Fund balance brought forward	11521	12944
Fund balances carried forward	<u>13105</u>	<u>11521</u>

Statement of Assets and Liabilities as at 31 December 2014

CURRENT ASSETS	2014	2013
	£	£
Bank Balances: Lloyds/TSB Current Account	75	412
CAF Bank Current Account	2642	-
COIF Deposit Account	<u>9586</u>	<u>10545</u>
	<u>12303</u>	<u>10957</u>
Claim for Tax Recovery on Gift Aid	605	322
Stock	<u>197</u>	<u>242</u>
	<u>13105</u>	<u>11521</u>
REPRESENTED BY FUNDS		
Restricted - Great Stones Way	4194	5862
Unrestricted - General Fund	<u>8911</u>	<u>5659</u>
	<u>13105</u>	<u>11521</u>

Notes to the Accounts:

- Major expenditure on the GSW Project:
 - Website development/hosting - £1,350
 - Guidebooks - £ 190.50
 - Half cost of new Projector - £ 112
 - Postages - £ 15
- Donation of £5,000 received from a Charitable Trust.

Approved by the Trustees on 31st March 2015
and signed on their behalf by:

J Edgerton

John Edgerton

Treasurer

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:

Ian Ritchie [Retiring]: (Chairman, and GSW): ian.ritchie1@btinternet.com
Jeffrey Goddard: (Secretary, and Thames Valley): jeffgod69@gmail.com
Sally Barnes (Membership Sec, and VWH): sallybarnes100@googlemail.com
John Edgerton (Treasurer, and Swindon) jedgerton1@virginmedia.com
Geoff Dare (Chilterns) geoffshashi@btinternet.com
James Gunter: (North Wilts) jagunter@btopenworld.com

Web-sites: www.ridgewayfriends.org.uk; www.greatstonesway.org.uk

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