

The Friends of The Ridgeway

Preserving the Spirit of The Ridgeway



Annual Report, 2015

About Us: *"For a better Ridgeway"*

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 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 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

As I write, 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: *'When all at once I saw a crowd/ A host of dancing Daffodils'*. Hopefully, the signs of spring are a harbinger of good summer weather to follow. Along with the daffodils, preparations for the AGM are appearing. And there is much to report on from the last year.



Last year when the spring flowers appeared, I was largely unaware of the Friends of the Ridgeway but not, of course, The Ridgeway itself. Over this past year I have learnt a lot about the Friends' organisation and feel proud to end the year as your Chairman. Whilst a huge amount has been accomplished under the guidance of your previous Chairman, Ian Ritchie, notably the control of damage by off-road vehicles over most of the route, there is a very real role for us in the coming years. The Ridgeway is a wonderful resource for all the communities that live along its route as well as for the public at large; this resource must be preserved and protected for future generations and its benefits brought to the attention of as many people as possible. This is the past, present and continuing future role of the Friends of the Ridgeway.

A new Ridgeway Partnership has been formed this year, inaugurated on 19 June, 2015, at a special ceremony at Nuffield Place.



The Partnership is an association of stakeholders, both local authorities and user groups, with funding for maintenance and development coming mainly from Natural England. The Friends of the Ridgeway is the only Partner focussed exclusively on The Ridgeway, and on the whole of it, not one section. We are also the only Partner representing the public interest at large in The Ridgeway, and not a particular activity. Our charitable objectives extend to the whole ancient Ridgeway, not just to the National Trail, so we retain an interest in The Great Stones Way as well as any future extension of the path. We are conscious that protecting The Ridgeway could be an issue if the Partnership were to lose grant support. Whilst we will continue as active members of the Ridgeway Partnership, we should not be subsumed within the Partnership but should retain our independence and freedom to act where we see fit to preserve the Ridgeway.

We shall continue to pursue the issue of the sections of the Ridgeway on which motor vehicles, off-road motor bikes and 4x4s, are still allowed. We have written to Government and the Prime Minister to press the case, with the welcome support of some of our Vice Presidents, for a working party to review policy on motor vehicle use of unsealed roads, and have been assured that action is imminent.



In order to pursue this and other issues, we need to speak on behalf of as many Ridgeway users as possible. We aspire to double our membership to maybe 1,000 or more. After the AGM we will be initiating a membership drive based on personal contact and recommendation; we hope that all present members will be willing to participate in this expansion effort.



The Ridgeway Partnership has proposed a wide-ranging and sustainable Refreshment programme to refurbish, after years of restrictions and relative inactivity, the image, attractions and facilities offered by The Ridgeway National Trail. This will,

it is hoped, provide a better experience for users of all types, attract more visitors with new interests, and thereby support landowners and service providers in the Ridgeway corridor. As detailed below, the programme is modelled around the five separate but inter linked themes identified for promotion of The Ridgeway in its varying markets.

In conjunction with this programme, The Friends of the Ridgeway are launching The Ridgeway Art Prize. Based on a generous donation, this will be an annual arts competition and prize with the theme of *'The Ridgeway: history, ecology, and landscape across the surrounding environs'*, with separate classes for painting, sculpture, photography and writing (poetry or prose).



We hope that our Ridgeway Friends Day this year, which will include not only the AGM for the Friends of the Ridgeway but also other activities and talks, will interest all those who value the Ridgeway - its



landscape, history and natural history. All will be welcome to join us. I look forward to meeting as many members and visitors as possible and to discussing the various issues for the Friends of the Ridgeway. Maybe we shall be able to enjoy a host of golden daffodils.

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 excellent 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, 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.

The Ridgeway Partnership:



Responsibility for the management, improvement and promotion of The Ridgeway National Trail has been assumed, from 1st April, 2015, by a new Ridgeway Partnership. The Partners include all the local authorities along the route, both AONBs, the Chiltern Society, the Ramblers, the National Trust, the

Country Landowners Association, and more. Oxfordshire Council is the Lead Partner, holding funds and accounts, hosting staff and supporting the volunteers, now assisted by Chiltern Society teams, who continue to maintain the high standards expected for the Trail. A Ridgeway Officer, Sarah Wright, co-ordinates operations. Natural England retains an overview of the National Trails network as a whole, and provides a base level of grant funding for its maintenance, reporting to DEFRA. The Friends of The Ridgeway is a founding Partner and played a significant role in setting up the new body. Our ex-Chairman, Ian Ritchie, is the first Chairman of the Partnership.



The Ridgeway has always been valued by local residents, and by those few visitors aware of its attractions. The economic benefits from tourism and recreation are substantial but not often recognised. In recent years, however, promotion of the National Trails has been

limited by funding constraints, and visits to The Ridgeway have fallen short of the potential. The involvement through the Partnership of so many organisations, public and private, with interests in maintaining the standards and promoting the many-layered appeal of The Ridgeway will raise awareness and help mobilise new resources.

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.

There are plans to improve access to The Ridgeway from villages along the route, linked to public transport, and links with other nearby attractions. The Partnership aims to engage the whole community in celebrating and raising visitor awareness of the appeal of The Ridgeway. A Ridgeway Forum will facilitate two-way communication, exchanging information, feedback and ideas, and opening up new initiatives for debate and criticism.



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 other volunteers, include 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, 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 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 National Trail 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 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, an Guide-book by Cicerone has been published. A

local group has assumed 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.

Events: Our Annual General Meeting will be held this year on 24th April, 2016, at the Village Hall, Goring, during the course of a Ridgeway Friends Day with various attractions, commencing with a Ridgeway Walk from 1100 am. Details are given on the enclosed flyer.

NOTICE OF THE 2015 ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

To be held at The Village Hall, Goring on Thames, on Sunday, 26th April, 2015, at 2.00 pm

There will be a guided walk along The Ridgeway leaving at 1000 am, to include a visit to Withymead Nature Reserve.

Talks will be given in the afternoon by Sarah Wright, Ridgeway Officer, and by Trustee Jim Gunter on recent discoveries at Stonehenge.

A complimentary CreamTea will be served.

The Vale of the White Horse Local Group

The Vale of the White Horse Local Group of The Friends of The Ridgeway is based in Faringdon. We meet there through the winter months for talks on a variety of subjects that have ranged over archaeology, geology, photography of The Ridgeway and its wildlife and flowers, the villages beneath the Ridge, drovers' roads and transport and local celebrations on The Ridgeway. During the summer, we try to organise walks around the down-land villages and places of interest.

Our Programme for 2016/2017 begins with a talk on 17th March, 2016, by Lesley Dunlop, Chair of GeoConservationUK and English Geodiversity Forum on – "The Geology and Evolution of the River Lambourn- a chalk stream". On 21st April, Neil Maw will be talking about the 'Secrets of Pennyhook Valley, Shrivenham.

Our meetings on the third Thursday of the month are open to all members, and guests are always welcome at a cost of £3. Anyone who is on the Friends of the Ridgeway email list will receive a reminder of the time and date a couple of weeks before the next talk. We hope that you will look at our programme and find something to interest and enjoy.



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.

Lord Avebury: Died 14th Feb. 2016. Liberal peer and life-long human rights campaigner and environmentalist, Lord Avebury gave strong support for many years to The Friends of The Ridgeway, particularly in our campaign for protection of The Ridgeway from off-road vehicles. We have also been grateful for his many generous donations to our funds.

THE FRIENDS OF THE RIDGEWAY

Treasurer's Report for the year to 31 December, 2015

The year was a financial success for two main reasons, in comparison with 2014:

- 1 A further donation of £5,000 from a Charitable Trust, to be held as a restricted fund for the purposes of the Ridgeway Partnership;
- 2 A bequest of £5,000 from the estate of a deceased member, with no restriction as to usage, so to be available as part of the Friends' General Fund.

However, the receipt of these funds should not mask the fact that, had they not been received, the surplus of income for the year would have been a mere £120 and that being after a sum of £325 was received from the HMRC in respect of Gift Aid.

Membership is decreasing and the Committee have decided that a drive to increase the number of members should be undertaken during 2016. Efforts are being made to contact those members who did not renew during 2015.

The total of funds available is now £23,225, of which £9,194 is restricted (Great Stones Way and Ridgeway Partnership) and £14,031 is unrestricted, i.e. available for purposes approved by the Friends' Committee in relation to the protection, upkeep and promotion of the Ridgeway. It should also be mentioned that any utilisation of the restricted funds must be for a purpose that is deemed by the Friends' Committee to also be for the benefit of the Ridgeway.

A Gift Aid claim of £460 has been made to the HMRC in respect of qualifying membership fees and donations received in 2015.

J Edgerton

John Edgerton

Treasurer

January 2016

THE FRIENDS OF THE RIDGEWAY

INCOME AND EXPENDITURE ACCOUNT FOR THE YEAR TO 31 DECEMBER 2015

INCOME	2015 £	Notes	2014 £
Subscriptions	2,173		2,050
Donations	10,702	1,2	5,355
Sales of Greetings Cards (net)	100		79
Sale of GSW book	0		6
Bank Interest COIF Charity Funds	43		41
Tax recovered by Gift Aid	325	3	283
Miscellaneous	25	4	
	<u>13,368</u>		<u>7,814</u>
 EXPENDITURE			
Newsletters/Annual report	1,242		2,027
Office Costs & Leaflets	318		341
Affiliation Fees	66		34
AGM Expenses	60		350
Website	205		726
Insurance	309		290
Local & Group Events	285		160
Meeting Expenses	753		514
Sundry Expenses	10		9
Equipment (projector – 50/50 with GSW)	0		112
Great Stones Way Project	0		1,667
	<u>3,248</u>		<u>6,230</u>
Surplus for the year	10,120		1,584
Fund Balances brought forward	13,105		11,521
Fund Balances carried forward	<u>23,225</u>		<u>13,105</u>

THE FRIENDS OF THE RIDGEWAY

STATEMENT OF ASSETS AND LIABILITIES FOR THE YEAR TO 31 DECEMBER 2015

CURRENT ASSETS	2015	2014
	£	£
Bank balances: Lloyds/TSB Current a/c	172	75
CAF Bank Current a/c	12,905	2,642
COIF Deposit a/c	9,630	9,586
	<u>22,707</u>	<u>12,303</u>
Claim for Tax Recovery (Gift Aid)	460	605
Stock of cards	58	197
	<u>23,225</u>	<u>13,105</u>
REPRESENTED BY FUNDS		
Restricted – Great Stones Way	4,194	4,194
Restricted – Ridgeway Partnership	5,000	0
Unrestricted – General Fund	14,031	8,911
	<u>23,225</u>	<u>13,105</u>

Notes to the Accounts:

- 1 Further donation of £5,000 received from a Charitable Trust for the specific purposes of the Ridgeway Partnership
- 2 Bequest of £5,000 received from estate of deceased member.
- 3 Gift Aid receipt in 2015 incorporated claims for 2 years (2013 £283, 2014 £325)
- 4 Refund of overpaid website account

Approved by the Trustees on 13 January 2016 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: (Proposed) (Chairman): anthony.burdall@burdall.net
Jeffrey Goddard: (Secretary, and Thames Valley): jeffgod69@gmail.com
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