



Winter Newsletter, January 2019



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From the Chairman

Dear Friends

The festivities are over. Winter is here. We are now in the dread days of January. But still the Ridgeway is there to refresh and uplift the spirit in the winter cold with the rebirth of spring to look forward to.

The Friends of the Ridgeway were founded some 35 years ago to preserve the spirit of the Ridgeway mainly in response to the abuse of the trail by motorised off-road vehicles. Unfortunately, even though use of motorised vehicles is restricted on much of the trail, reports of damage to the trail and improper use of motor vehicles continue to be received.

A recent report concerned increasing 4x4 activities on the stretch of the trail between the A338 Wantage/Great Shefford road and the B road from Wantage/Newbury. Damage was reported by two riders; one horse fell over when her hoof got stuck in a wheel rut on a slope, causing both horse and rider to crash to the ground. The horse was surprisingly unhurt, although very muddy on one side, but the rider sustained a painful shoulder. This accident is believed to be entirely due to traffic use. But unfortunately the actual vehicles damaging that section of the trail have not been seen meaning that no evidence is available to use in any action.

In a separate incident, a group of 4x4s were reported driving west along the trail, just to the west of the Sparsholt Firs car park on Sunday morning 20 January 2019. They were very obviously off roading and travelling fast with much mud and spray. A 3 or 4 year old girl on her 'bike' with her father were seen having a wonderful time paddling through the puddles; Father and daughter enjoying the Ridgeway as it should be. They continued on their way either up the drive to Hill Barn or round the corner along the trail just before the 4x4s speed through. There is no report as to what happened to the little girl. The 4x4 drivers were noted to obviously having difficulty keeping the vehicles under control. This incident has been reported to the Police.





If you see motorised vehicles on the trail, please photograph them showing the number plate to provide evidence that we can use. We must be vigilant if we are to protect the Ridgeway. The objective of the Friends of the Ridgeway has been and remains to *'preserve the ancient Ridgeway paths along the chalk downs of Southern England'* in particular from the ravages of motor vehicles.

In previous Newsletters we have reported on the funding issues being faced by the Ridgeway Partnership which inevitably impact on their ability to manage the trail. The Natural England grant for the current year is less than previous years and for 2019-2020 will be a reduction of 5%; this annual reduction will continue in the future. This funding issue affects all National Trails and its impact is leading to the establishment of an association of National Trails so that they are represented on the same way as National Parks and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

Turning to more cheerful matters, all members should have received notification of the Swire Ridgeway Arts Prize and exhibition to be held in the Thomas Hughes Memorial Hall, Uffington on Saturday and Sunday 27 - 28 April 2019. 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. Sunday 28 April 2019 will be the Ridgeway Friends Day which will include the AGM – please put the date in your diary and come along to see the exhibition and meet others interested in the Ridgeway.

Throughout the year, the Friends of the Ridgeway Vale Of The White Horse Local Group hold a series of meetings and activities. The next meeting will be on Thursday 21 February at 7:30 pm in the Old Town Hall, Faringdon when the speaker will be Owen Green talking on 'Legacy & life of William 'Strata' Smith'. It would be wonderful to welcome more local groups along the Ridgeway.



Photo courtesy of Janet Parsons

We would very much like to recruit more volunteers to help run and administer the organisation. Over the last year, for various reasons, two Committee Members have stepped down and others have been and continue to be restricted in their activities by health issues. Volunteers to join the Committee are urgently needed and would be most welcome. Please don't hesitate, just email, telephone or write to me and I'll be delighted to hear from you.

In particular, we would like to hear from anyone who is willing and able to assist in maintaining our web site and other electronic communications; we are looking for someone who can update websites using WordPress.

Winter is now with us but spring is just round the corner.

With all best wishes
Anthony Burdall

The Secretary's Minute Book

The trustees continue to meet quarterly.

The Treasurer's Report continues to show a healthy surplus with income for the year boosted by several large donations. However, the amount of funds that is 'unrestricted' (that is available for any of the charity's objectives rather than for a specific purpose) remains modest and we continue to be grateful for the support of our members. The membership at the end of 2018 stood at 475 and the reminders for the 2019 subscriptions for those who pay annually (142) have recently been emailed out.

We have investigated the potential for the Ridgeway becoming a World Heritage site. However the process could take up to 10 years there are the strict criteria for selection. There are 1092 World heritage sites worldwide with only 3 relating to long distance trails, with the nearest equivalent being the Routes of Santiago de Compostela. The criteria listed for this included 'important interchange of human values over a span of time which illustrate significant stages in human history and associated with events or ideas of outstanding universal significance'. This highlights the scale of the issue and it was thought we would be unlikely to succeed. A better case could be made if the trail was extended coast to coast and thus bringing other world heritage sites into play (Stonehenge, Jurassic coast etc.). We concluded that the time was not right to divert resources into this but to wait until we have created the bigger picture of the Great Chalk way.

Some years ago there was an initiative to create local groups promote the Ridgeway in their area, increase knowledge and get local people involved. Unfortunately this had not really taken off and the Vale of White Horse local group remains the only local group. With our limited resources we remain supportive of this group and have agreed to a modest level of support. However would like to see more local groups to promote the ridgeway along its length.

We continue to meet regularly with the Ridgeway Partnership and where appropriate to support projects presented to us. Recent potential projects include upgrading of some of the signage, investigating how to get more accurate visitor numbers along sections of the path and looking at more effective ways of promoting the Ridgeway and raising funds.

Alan Chater
Secretary

History of the Ridgeway

With the possible exception of Hadrian's Wall, the Ridgeway is the most historic of all the National Trails or long distance walks Not only the oldest road but with many ancient hill forts, burial grounds and other monuments steeped in ancient and not so ancient history; I was amazed to hear that the Uffington White Horse which to me is an ancient prehistoric hill figure dating from the Iron or Bronze Age, has a modern history due to being a target for American air force fighters in the Second World War.

It is an ambition of the Friends of the Ridgeway to do more to promote the historical aspects of the Ridgeway. So far we have no definite plans but hope the following article will be of interest.

Anthony Burdall



Excavations on Avebury Down, Avebury, Wiltshire

It never ceases to amaze me how many more significant archaeological sites there are still to be discovered around Avebury at the western end of the Ridgeway. It is even more surprising how they come to light.

Back in 2006, I was working in the archives at the Alexander Keiller Museum sorting old collections of worked flint objects that had been found over the decades in and around Avebury. There were thousands of them, many



The location of the Foot of Avebury Down site

collected in the 1920s by a local vicar – the Revd H G O Kendall - who seems to have spent most of the time between Sunday services indulging in his pastime of looking for prehistoric artefacts in the wider landscape. The bags of flint had been largely untouched since then. One group of his bags contained some 400 objects from a mystery site. No-one had been able to work out where he had been searching; the only detail he left was “Foot of Avebury Down”. This Down covers the entire slope in an area of about 4km² to the west of the Ridgeway from Green Street junction to Avebury itself. Having carried out a geophysical survey in this area previously which identified what may have been pits where flint had been extracted and with the help of some old large scale OS maps I developed a hunch about a possible location for the finds. Convincing the National Trust archaeologist, Dr Nick Snashall, and the museum’s curator, Dr Ros Cleal, that my site was worth investigating a small team of experts conducted a two hour on-the-ground investigation. A further 181 pieces of worked flint were collected. Bingo! We had found the site.

Later in 2013 a fuller, systematic evaluation of the site was undertaken. In total, 573 pieces of worked flint were recovered. It was agreed that the site would be a suitable location for an excavation under the umbrella of the *Living with Monuments Project*, a joint venue between the Universities of Southampton, Leicester, Ghent and Cambridge, Allen Environmental Archaeology and the National Trust. The project’s aim is to redress a critical imbalance in our knowledge of life and cultural landscapes during the Neolithic and Early Bronze Age (c.4000-1500 BC). Past research has been dominated by investigating the creation of the large monuments which form the most visible part of its archaeological record. By contrast, knowledge of the character of contemporary settlement and other non-monument focussed activity lags behind. The *Living with Monuments Project* aims to redress this imbalance through a programme of targeted fieldwork within the Avebury landscape.

While little known, its commanding and significant landscape location, overlooking Avebury henge, along with the distinctive range of lithic implements recovered from it, marks The Foot of Avebury Down site as one of great potential significance. Nodular flint outcrops, and the potential accessibility of workable stone provides one reason for the scatter’s location being produced here.

Excavation took place over a period of three weeks during late July to mid August 2017. In total 9 trenches were opened exposing some 421m² of chalk surface. Some trenches were small - just 2m x 2m – whilst one extended to 15m x 2m.



One of the many pits being excavated

Together they revealed evidence of occupation and use of the site from much earlier than expected, with late Mesolithic (5th millennium BC) elements, along with evidence dating to the Middle Neolithic through to the Early Bronze Age (3500 – 1500BC). Dating has been mostly by analysing types and styles of flint tools and, in the Neolithic and Bronze Ages, by recognisable pottery types – Peterborough Ware from Middle Neolithic found as scatters, and Grooved Ware from Later Neolithic found in pits, in particular.

Features uncovered included many pits, some related to flint extraction, others to settlement activity such as animal bone, worked flint and pottery. Some of the animal bones were from aurochs – the huge wild ancestor of domestic cattle that became extinct in Britain during the Neolithic. Antler picks – used to gauge out the pits and post-holes were also found.

Clusters of stake-holes were encountered. The most impressive were 17 forming a zone 6.5m x 3.0m. Another group of five stake-holes formed a short (1.3m) line. These all could have been part of shelters or temporary dwellings.

In one trench there was evidence of a hollow being cut into the chalk slope to form a level platform? In this were several post-holes and a pit. The pit had a deposit containing aurochs bone hinting at feasting. Taken all together these elements provided the best evidence for a structure. Its position facing directly into the eastern entrance of the Avebury henge may also mark it out as special and of elevated status.



The Conygar Hill Type D barbed-and-tanged Bronze Age arrowhead

The large amount of flint debitage “chippings” recovered is an indication of the industrial scale of flint extraction and working at this site utilising the copious supply of natural flint nodules which still could be found on the site. The slopes of Avebury Down were perhaps a major source of workable flint during the Neolithic and Early Bronze Age of the region.

Amongst the flint tools found there were fine Early Bronze Age barbed-and-tanged arrowheads. One group of 4 were found in a small group including an exceptionally fine

arrowhead of Green's Conygar Hill type D.

If the results of the trenches are in any way representative, the site looks exceptional. There could be upwards of 80 pits in this zone alone. Despite its necessarily limited scale, the excavation has highlighted the significance and enormous potential of the prehistoric archaeology of the foot of Avebury Down. Pit and worked flint densities are very high for this region, and bespeak of a substantive and lasting (if intermittent) presence.

Jim Gunter

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Article based on the Interim Report produced by The Living With Monuments Project Team

The Swire Ridgeway Arts Prize

For the Swire Ridgeway Arts Prize in 2018, the number and quality of the written entries was outstanding with several pieces commanding attention. Clover Stroud commented that every single entry had real merits and picking a winner was a very difficult job. To celebrate these entries, another is published below alongside a beautiful pencil drawing of Dragon Hill from the White Horse.



SPIRIT OF THE RIDGEWAY

*Spirit of the Ridgeway where ere I roam
Spirit of the Ridgeway calling me home*

*Far back in time when all was still
Hidden in mist, emerged the hill*

*Of chalky spine the way is long
From west to east come feel the song*

*From Avebury stones, through Wessex downs
A way for all, a path now found*

*Along Chiltern's scarp, near Icknield Way
Then on to Ivinghoe, our heads to lay*

*A place of rest for creatures past
Where fossils lie in soil, held fast*

*Ancient man he heard the call
Bury your dead in the ancient hall*

*A route to march for soldiers strong
Hill forts remain of battles won*

*In woodland glades, a place to lay
On grassy downs, a place to play*

*Spirit of the Ridgeway wherever I roam
Spirit of the Ridgeway calling me home*

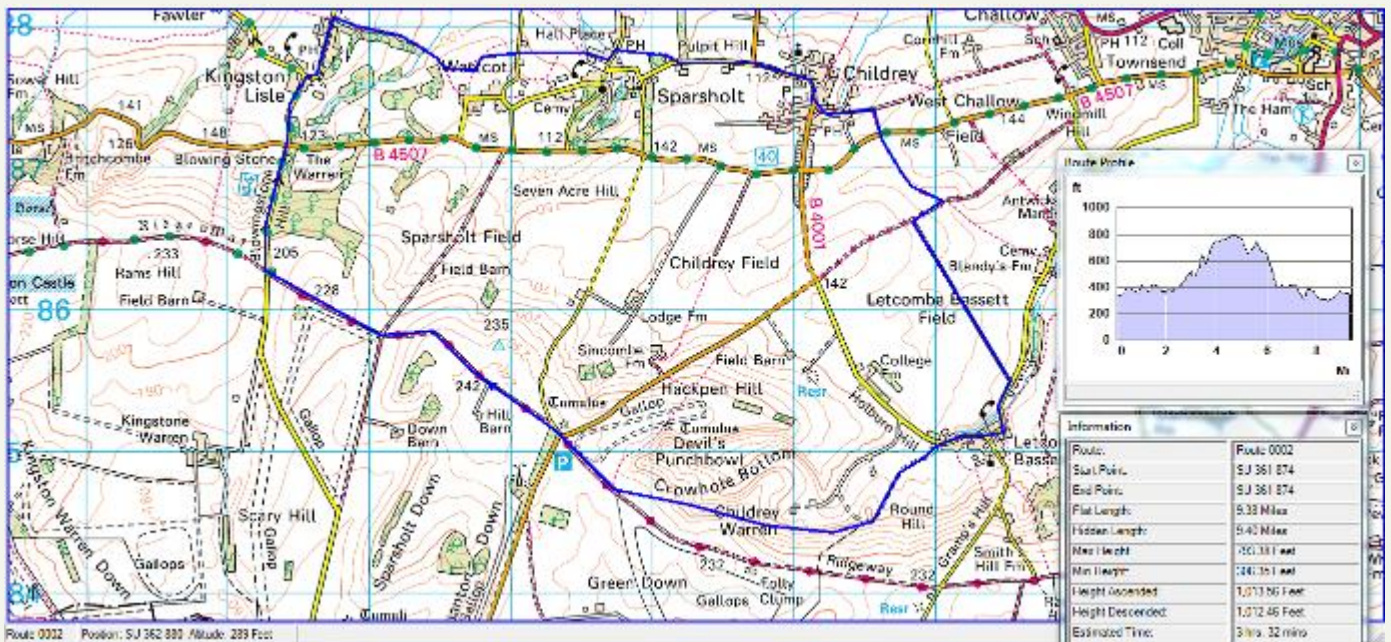
Sue Cain

Circular pub walks on the Ridgeway

Some years ago, Friends of the Ridgeway member sent to the then Secretary some walks for publication in the Newsletter. At that time, two of the ten walks were published but the others for some reason were left unpublished. Recently they have been sent in again and the first of the unpublished walks is shown below.

Childrey –Devil’s Punchbowl – Kingston Lisle-Sparsholt

This walk starts in the beautiful village of Childrey nestled in the downs, crossing to Letcombe Basset and the up to the Devils Punchbowl and along the Ridgeway before dropping down Blowingstone Hill to Kingston Lisle and the Blowingstone Inn before returning to Childrey.



Maps: OS Explorer #170 OS Landranger #174

Strenuous climb @ paragraph # 8

Distances: Start to " Blowingstone Inn " in Kingston Lisle 7 miles.

Start to " The Star Inn " in Sparsholt = 8.5 miles.

Total distance 9.5 miles.

Directions:

- 1 Driving from the Wantage direction on the B4507, at the junction with the B4001 in a dip, turn right into Childrey and park in the High Street. There is room past the duck pond on the right (SU 361 874) in a lane to the right of the Working Men's Club & Reading Room. They even provide a bench here for putting your boots on!
- 2 Walk back along the High Street now with the pond on your left towards "The Hatchet" PH. Just before the pub, turn left into Stowhill, marked 'cul de sac'. After 250 yards, where the lane divides, take the right hand branch marked 'dead end except for access', climbing for 230 yards until you reach a path leading off to the right with a left hand waymark.
- 3 Turn right here along a tree-lined track, opening out to a grassy track, to meet the B4507 after 200 yards. Cross here and continue straight on into a field marked 'footpaths to the Letcombes'. Continue straight on for almost half a mile as the path bends to the left to reach a crossing tree-lined track.
- 4 Turn right along the rutted track, climbing gently for 260 yards until a left hand track appears. Turn left onto this track with views ahead up to the Ridgeway and Segsbury Camp. Continue straight on between open fields for almost one mile to meet Bassett Road which connects the two Letcombe villages.
- 5 Turn right towards the village of Letcombe Bassett, once famous for the watercress beds in the Letcombe Brook, a spring-line stream. As you descend the hill there are lovely views of the brook on both sides, which you cross via a bridge. Now climb into Letcombe Bassett bearing right past Rectory Lane on your left. Carry straight on, ignoring Gramps Hill on the left.
- 6 As you start to leave the village, turn left after a children's playground past a pair of semi-detached houses to the right. There is now a signpost giving information on the new Permissive Footpath which will take you along the left hand inner side of the Devil's Punchbowl up to the Ridgeway. The path then veers half right across a field, clearly visible and waymarked by small piles of stones to the right of the path.
- 7 At the top of the field head towards a right hand post and wire fence. Follow the fence. Where it ends after 250 yards, turn right on a grassy track for 30 yards to a metal gate and metal kissing gate. After this the path divides three ways; take the middle route straight on downhill towards a right hand tree line and fence on a grassy track. Follow this track with the tree line to your right. After ½ a mile, you reach a gate with another signpost and map near a cattle trough.
- 8 Now bear half right climbing steeply towards the fence corner post, watching out for rabbit holes. Here bear left following the right hand fence for 200 yards up towards a metal kissing gate. This route is easier than a direct climb through the middle of the gully. There are tremendous views back towards the Letcombes, Didcot, the Wittenham Clumps and the distant Chiltern escarpment.
- 9 Now continue straight on uphill to a waymark beside another metal gate. Here, turn right with the fence on your left for 100 yards to another sign post and continue straight on until, with the fence to your left, pass through another metal kissing gate. Now climb straight on towards another left hand fence and follow this for ⅓ mile to a left hand kissing gate.
- 10 Turn left through the kissing gate and immediately pass through a gap in a second fence, crossing a field on a clear track to reach the Ridgeway beside the remnants of an old ladder stile. Turn right onto the Ridgeway for ⅓ mile to cross the B4001. Carry straight on, on a tarmac road beside a left hand grassy triangle and where the road bends right towards Sparsholt, continue on the Ridgeway.





- 11 After almost one mile on the Ridgeway, passing a drinking water tap near Hill Barn, continue on past a crossing track to Sparsholt Field. Half a mile further on you meet the minor road from Lambourne to Kingston Lisle - Blowing Stone Hill. Turn right, descending past a cottage garden on the right containing the Blowing Stone, (a large sarsen with a hole in it; if you blow hard enough, you produce a horn-like noise) to cross the B4507 again, and straight on towards Kingston Lisle. In the village turn right at a T junction, continuing as the road bends left then straightens. The 'Blowing Stone Inn' is 300 yards along on the right.
 - 12 Turn right out of the PH for 150 yards past a bus shelter, then turn right again opposite a black timber-clad building named 'Rat Flat' into Drove Way. Continue straight on for almost ½ mile past a right hand belt of woodland. At the end of the woodland, the path bears right climbing gently, then bearing left past another right hand tree belt.
 - 13 Where this tree belt ends, turn right to meet the fence of Westcot Farm; now turn left continuing with the fence on your right to the top right hand corner of the field, towards a pair of houses, left white and right black. Go over the stile at the end of the fence to the right of the black house in the field corner to reach a minor road between house names 'West Lee' and 'Beech Tree Cottage' (the black house).
 - 14 Turn right here for 70 yards and just past a brick house with a detached garage, turn left onto a signed public footpath and carry straight on into a field with a right hand fence. At the end of the fence cross a wooden stile & turn left between trees. Where the trees end continue across an open field for 200 yards to meet a crossing track. Here turn right for another 200 yards to the edge of the field, then continue on a grassy track between houses to reach West Street in Sparsholt.
 - 15 At the end of West Street, turn left into Watery Lane; the 'Star Inn' is opposite. Turn right out of the pub for 70 yards and opposite a white house turn right again over a stile onto a public footpath across a grassy meadow, towards a very tight kissing gate in the fence ahead. Go through this gate and across another grassy field with a coppice on your right. At the end of the coppice, the path bears right through a fence gap, climbing gently for 140 yards to meet a right hand gate and stile. Go over the style and turn left into Pulpit Hill.
 - 16 Follow this road for $\frac{2}{3}$ mile back into Childrey and as it bears right, back to the start.
-