



Summer Newsletter, July 2019



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From the Chairman

Dear Friends

Summer has arrived. As I write, the sun is streaming in, beckoning me to get out – but when I go out on the trail, it clouds over. It must be summer. This year along with spring and improving weather, there has been good news for the trail.

The original objective of the Friends of the Ridgeway was to protect the trail from abuse 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.

Wiltshire Council has made a decision to close part of The Ridgeway National Trail to mechanically propelled vehicles this summer to enable repairs to be carried out. The length affected is the first few miles of the Ridgeway National Trail within the Stonehenge and Avebury World Heritage Site between Overton Hill and Hackpen Hill. The repairs will protect the underlying archaeology. Details are given in the Wiltshire Council press release at <http://www.wiltshire.gov.uk/news/articles/repair-works-to-ridgeway-national-trail> It has to be good news that the underlying archaeology is, at last, now to be protected.



And last year, at the request of the Trail Riders Federation, Oxfordshire County Council carried out a consultation regarding 32 Applications to Amend The Legal Record of Public Rights of Way in Oxfordshire. Many of these applications would have impacted heavily on the Ridgeway, in effect allowing motor vehicles use the trail. It is understood that the Council has determined against all the applications bar one; the one not so far determined is for Lower Icknield Way, Lewknor, Aston Rowant and Crowell.

There are far fewer vehicles on the Ridgeway than used to be the case, and hence less mud and damage. Sarah Wright, the Trail Officer, has published guidance on how and where motor vehicle use of the trail is restricted, and what you should do if you see illegal motor vehicle activity on the Ridgeway. This can be seen on the Ridgeway National Trail website at <https://www.nationaltrail.co.uk/ridgeway/news/driving-ridgeway-and-what-do-if-you-see-illegal-activity> The Police continue to address isolated incidents and it is good to report that there have been vehicle confiscations linked to illegal driving of motor vehicles on the Ridgeway, as recently as 2019. Members of the public witnessing illegal activity should (a) first make themselves safe; then (b) call 999 if a crime is in progress or, after the event, call the non-emergency number 101; and (c) if at all possible, get photographs and obtain information such as registration plates, descriptions of the vehicles and drivers, accurate description of location etc. The Institute of Public Rights of Way and Access Management (the professional body for public rights of way staff) says the summary is *'an unusually accurate write-up of a convoluted subject'* on its Facebook page.



But damage to the trail is not limited to moving vehicles; an abandoned 4x4 was seen on the Ridgeway, near Uffington Castle. The local authority was aware and, at the time of writing, the vehicle has been removed. But why do people just dump vehicles like this?

To replace a very worn and slippery surface, in recent weeks there have been resurfacing works on the trail on the section behind Uffington Castle. These include, half way up the slope, concrete blocks placed to prevent vehicles passing along the trail and protect the new surface. This maintenance work was paid for from donations made to events carried out on the Ridgeway; there is a never ending need to fund basic maintenance works as the Natural England grant is insufficient to cover all but the essential trail team costs. In this context volunteers are vital. And in 2018 the Friends of the Ridgeway made a grant to fund a volunteer monitor project; three events were held for volunteers monitoring The Ridgeway. Twenty one volunteers attended, each receiving a rucksack of equipment to enable them to do 'light jobs'.

The Ridgeway National Trail is one of a family of National Trails administered by Natural England. Together they are in the process of forming a National Trails Association to better put the case for National Trails to Government in the same way as National Parks and ANOBs. Each year Natural England produces a report on the English National Trails; the most recent edition, published in May 2019, provides an overview of what has been achieved in the 2017/18 financial year. In summary:

- National Government maintenance funding enabled leverage of an additional £1.5 million to support development across all 13 trails and open sections of the England Coast Path.
- The England Coast Path continued to develop with new partnerships being formed across the country to support its ongoing management.
- Trails are being well maintained and promoted, and continue to receive high levels of positive feedback from users and other national stakeholders.



- Trail Partnerships are working together to support better representation at the national level whilst continuing to take active roles in the management of individual trails.
- National funding initiatives are supporting wider promotional work to maximise the trails' contributions to tourism initiatives, including those aimed at overseas visitors.

The Ridgeway was specifically mentioned for the strategic links connecting the trail to local villages and facilities; research by Oxford University to assess the quality of the trail corridor along the Ridgeway by flying a drone along its entire length, funded by the Friends of the Ridgeway; and attention drawn to the Ridgeway and its unique characteristics by the comedian and musician Bill Bailey who walked the trail in aid of Cancer Research UK, from east to west, and his efforts were covered by Countryfile.



The Ridgeway Friends Day, including the AGM, was held on Sunday 28 April 2019 at the Thomas Hughes Memorial Hall, Uffington. In addition to the AGM, there was a wider range of activities, including the Swire Ridgeway Arts Prize Exhibition and Prize giving.



The Swire Ridgeway Arts Prize was again held this year with more entries and a greater variety of art works. This annual competition is helping to establish and celebrate the creative and artistic inspiration of the Ridgeway. A full report is given below.

Building on the art prize, the Ridgeway Officer, Sarah Wright, organised, on behalf of the Ridgeway Partnership, a Ridgeway Forum, entitled 'Get Creative along the Ridgeway' based on the creative inspiration of the Ridgeway. This was held on Saturday 29 June 2019 at St Dunstan's Church, Monks Risborough.

Turning to the administration of the Friends of the Ridgeway, in response to the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) coming into force, the majority of members have responded indicating that they are happy to receive emails and other communications from the Friends of the Ridgeway. Regrettably some members have not responded. If you have not yet done so, please complete the Communication Form on our web site.

At the AGM, we were delighted to welcome Tim Lewis and Carole Ruse as Committee Members and Trustees. As always, we would welcome further committee members - please do volunteer.

Enjoy the summer along the Ridgeway.

With all best wishes
Anthony Burdall

The Secretary's Minute Book

The arts prize and exhibition is reported on elsewhere, but it also helped draw a substantial attendance on for the Ridgeway Friends day. The AGM was the formal meeting of the day but it was disappointing to note that only a minority of the members attended the meeting. We keep our members informed by our regular newsletters and website but the AGM is the opportunity to raise any issues or concerns to the trustees and to influence the future direction.

Anthony Burdall, our Chairman, reported on another eventful year. In particular he noted that motor vehicles using the Ridgeway continued to be an issue and pointed out the pictures in the Annual report showing one such incident. It was pleasing to note that the seasonal Traffic Regulation Order (TRO) on the section of the Ridgeway that runs through the World Heritage site had been extended for this summer to enable repairs to the surface and it was hoped that the TRO would become permanent in the future.

Anthony thanked the Committee for their work and all the present Officers and Trustees were re-elected en bloc together with two new trustees, Tim Lewis and Carole Ruse. There are short pieces on the new trustees in this newsletter.

The Treasurer's Report and Accounts were adopted with the accounts showing a healthy surplus with income for the year boosted by several large donations. The elections of Lord Bradshaw as president, and our Vice-presidents were all duly carried. Anthony thereupon drew the AGM to a close and introduced the prize giving for the Swire Ridgeway Arts Prize.

Finally, the Chairman encouraged members to look at and participate in the Friends of the Ridgeway's Facebook page which was another method of keeping members up to date with current issues.

Alan Chater
Secretary

Treasurer's Update

By way of an update on the financial position following on from the AGM on 28 April, overall funds have moved on to £59,761 from the total of £51,241 stated in the Annual Report.

A further generous Trust based donation of £10,000 has been received into Restricted Funds to help with the furtherance for a number of years of the now-established Swire Ridgeway Arts Prize. Membership fees (£1,571) Gift Aid receipts and other donations (£642) have also been received.

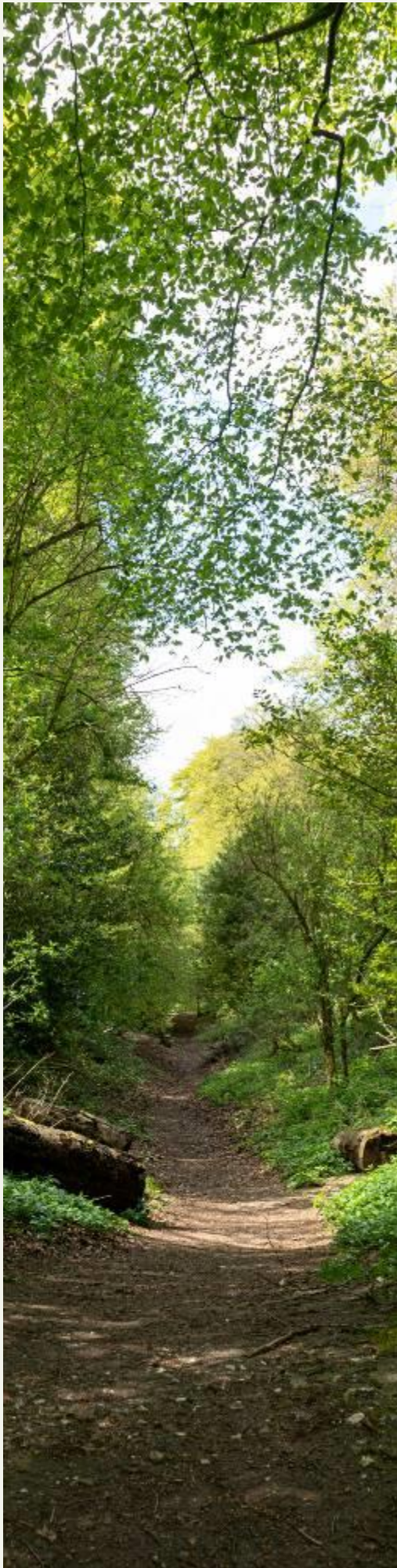
The cost of the Swire Ridgeway Arts Prize is £1,956 offset by commission from sales of works from the exhibition giving a net cost of £1,880. Costs for the Annual Report are £690, while insurance, IT services and administration have accounted for a further £948.

Membership numbers are:

2019 paid:	135
Complimentary/ Life:	338
Total:	473

John Edgerton
Treasurer





Tim Lewis

Having been a member of the Friends of the Ridgeway for some time, he became involved in the group which is considering how best to bring about the Friends of the Ridgeway's vision to create the Great Chalk Way. This involvement built on his interest in long distance paths in the UK, and those in Wiltshire in particular, which has some relevance to his role as the Area Footpath Secretary for Wiltshire Ramblers. He has held this role since February 2013 when he volunteered for it in order to try to make a positive and practical contribution to the maintenance and improvement of the almost 4,000 miles of rights of way in this wonderful county of ours. Coming to walking fairly late in life, after returning from living and working in Hong Kong for 20 years, he has done his best to make up for it!



The Ridgeway National Trail was the first long distance trail he walked, from October 2004 to June 2006 (having had to return to Hong Kong for 6 months in the middle!), and since then he has walked many more, with the latest one completed being the South West Coast Path, all 632 miles of it. Because it was the first long distance path he walked, and has so much history and variety of scenery, it holds a special place in his heart; it also starts in and goes through the World Heritage Site of Avebury, where I happens to live; he would be delighted to see motorised vehicles being permanently banned from using the Ridgeway within the WHS, and ideally elsewhere along it too.

Tim Lewis

Carole Ruse

Carole has lived in the small downland village of East Garston in the Lambourn Valley for 26 years. She is currently owner of Cosy Paws Cattery, a luxury boarding facility for cats.



Previously a Local Government Officer, working with community groups and volunteers on Parish Planning and community projects, Carole took a change of direction 10 years ago to start her business.

Having lived all her life in rural areas, Carole has a long-held interest in rights of way and public access. She is on the committee of the Mid and West Berkshire Local Access Forum and has attended British Horse Society training on Rights of Way. She has previously held positions on the Hampshire Access Forum and was



at that time Access Officer for British Driving Society Hampshire, both volunteer roles.

A keen walker and equestrian, Carole's main interest is carriage driving and she drives two Welsh Ponies to a four wheel vehicle, both for pleasure and in competition. Carole and her husband David, now try to carriage drive locally and up to the Ridgeway when possible, fitting this in with busy lives and other volunteer commitments.

The Ridgeway has been an inspiration to Carole since moving to Berkshire (and previously Wiltshire) 30 years ago from East Anglia. Many weekends were spent walking with her children and husband along the Ridgeway from that time on. Carole firmly believes that an introduction to walking and the countryside at a young age, establishes a relationship for life. So it has been for her family.

Carole Ruse

The Swire Ridgeway Arts Prize

Over the weekend of Saturday and Sunday 27 and 28 April 2019, the Swire Ridgeway Arts Prize exhibition was held in the Thomas Hughes Memorial Hall, Uffington. The exhibition formed the centre piece of the Ridgeway Friends Day. This is the third year that the arts prize has been held, celebrating the artistic inspiration of the Ridgeway; the Committee have announced that the arts prize and exhibition will be an annual event.



The exhibition was set up on Thursday and Friday with judging carried out Friday afternoon. Saturday and Sunday the exhibition was open to the public who not only to saw the arts works but enjoyed the goodies from the café in the hall. Sunday was the Ridgeway Friends Day and Friends of the Ridgeway AGM.

Entries to the competition were more than previously but with fewer written entries and photographs than last year offset by a significant increase in sculpture entries. Several competitors have commented that as an annual competition it is and will continue to gain momentum. There was a considerable variety of works entered, including some wonderful textile pictures. Whilst entries came predominantly from the Wiltshire and Oxfordshire ridgeway corridor, some were received from further afield with one potential entrant resident in New York.

All works entered were exhibited making a wonderful and varied exhibition of art works inspired by the Ridgeway. The ambiance of the exhibition was enhanced by the Café provided by the local caterer. A large thank you is due to all entrants for submitting works; there was a wonderful entry enabling a comprehensive exhibition to be mounted including a large variety of works not only between categories but within the individual categories. The judges once again commented on the quality and variety of the entries. The overall winner was a piece of sculpture.



The Judges



Esther Lafferty with prize winners



'Me and my Son'

The results of the competition were announced and prizes awarded at the Prize Giving after the Friends of the Ridgeway AGM. The Judges were:

- (a) Esther Lafferty, Chair of Judges, is the Festival Director of Oxfordshire Artweeks, a visual arts festival involving around 1,000 artists and 450 venues each year. She has a Masters Degree in Human Sciences from the University of Oxford and worked as a medical publisher before turning her hand to writing and event organisation, reviewing children's literature.
- (b) Amanda Hislop, painting judge. She works as an artist combining drawn and painted marks with the tactile qualities of thread, paper and fabric. The essence of the landscape and natural forms inspire her work. In addition, she is a teacher and lecturer and runs one and two day workshops and longer summer schools designed to stretch creative imagination with a strong emphasis on intuitive exploration and pushing beyond boundaries. She also is a prize winner for her art.
- (c) Clover Stroud, written work judge. She is a local author of the Ridgeway memoir *'The Wild Other'*; she writes for the Daily Mail, Sunday Times, Daily Telegraph and Conde Nast Traveller amongst others. She lives in Oxfordshire with her husband and five children.
- (d) Paul Wilkinson, photographic judge, is one of the UK's most sought-after photographers. With a life-long love of photography and a passion for creating beautiful, timeless images, he has established himself at the top of his profession as a people photographer. Paul has won an array of awards for his work and is now an International Judge.
- (e) Jo Boseley, the sculpture judge, is an Oxfordshire based sculptor, known for her quirky and unusual hand built stoneware ceramics for the home and garden inspired by the natural world. She exhibits, including in Oxfordshire Artweeks, and is a teacher.

After much debate amongst the judges (and subsequently amongst visitors to the exhibition), the piece that best expressed the 'Spirit of Ridgeway' was a sculpture by Michele Greene. The winners were:

- Overall winner and Sculpture: Michele Greene 'Me and my Son'
- Written: Peter Wild, The Spirit of the Ridgeway
- Photography: Sean Dunlop 'Ridgeway view of our ancestors'
- Painting: Katherine Foxhall 'Into the Manger'.

Esther Lafferty in summing up the entries commented on the range and excellence of the exhibited works. In the painting category, she highlighted a delicate textile piece of 'painting with fabric' by Barbara Shaw, showing the view from Coombe Hill, at the very other end of the Ridgeway and a beautiful mosaic by Wendy Bobennie of an owl on a way marker pointing out the route between the two! It's broken crockery marked the passing of time in a wonderfully rich and colourful way. As a panel the judges commended a stylised contemporary print of Avebury by Brian Button, accessible and representative of a very special place.

The painting runner up is 'Racing in the Rain' by Jill Smith – which Amanda noted particular technical merit as well as the sense of space it gives. You can also read the shape of history in the landscape with its suggestions of age-old undulations. The light coming through thundery clouds could be something spiritual or just the weather which as we all know can change in an instant up on the ridgeway from sunny to stormy.

The painting category winner is a small delicate etching by Katherine Foxhall 'Into the Manger'. This was felt to have been skilfully done and unlike any of the other pieces on show, encapsulating a big spirit in a very small space. In the colour of the land itself, there's an understated charm and a timeless calm, a drifting shadow and wispy detail in the foreground, and it was the picture that pulled her back time and time again.

The winner in the photography category was judged Sean Dunlop's 'Ridgeway view of our ancestors'. This is a technically difficult blended image from 15 separate photographs showing the milky way over the Ridgeway adding spirituality to the ridgeway view that to people in Faringdon and the Vale is instantly recognisable. The runner up, by Alec French, is a photo of the red coated hunt on the ridgeway. There's great perspective, lighting timing and composition, although the panel did debate the subject matter for some time. The photo is of the now, with modern day vehicles, and yet of the past too, a pastime that was once popular and is now frowned upon in the main, and so there's a photo documentary quality to it. It's of historical merit marking the moment, and a commentary for the future perhaps too.

Spirit of the Ridgeway

The view I see is remarkable
it is one of space and time...
I remember an age when
this chap said
"lets draw some lines," and I said, "of course"
but I did not imagine
that he would draw - a horse
and that this then would define,
keep me trapped
but also set me free
like a tattoo - you know,
a unique feature - letting me be me.

Many lines connect our lives
and so one day
much much later
I was visited by a family of three generations
peering at the sky
looking at my horse
so white
but more intent on wind speed
as they'd come to fly their kite
their line in the sky
a fine line linking hillside,
family, timeI cry

because It came to my attention recently
that one of the three was no more
the other two now older
no longer fly kites
but may one day
if a new line comes their way
the old line now fragile
links to other times
through spoken words, and pictures of those days
and driving by en route
they pause and cast a glance
their kite still in the boot

And as I recall them laughing and playing
I shed my tears for times gone by
immortal as I seem
I can sometimes get weary
being a part of life - yet not
(the horse ensures I will not be forgot)
the view has changed
you can see me but not as I see you?
As my slopes still
provide a backdrop for the living
I'm glad he drew those lines
it serves to keep my spirit giving

Peter Wild



Across Roof Into the Manger (Painted 2/2019)



The sculpture category included a number of wildlife pieces – and hares in particular from one crouching in tactile stone by Sharon Rich, another mantel-piece-sized character light-heartedly licking its ceramic ear, and a giant depiction of the landmarks of the Ridgeway painted around a six foot hare by Jo Marshall.

The winning sculpture, and the winner over all, was by Michele Greene. It shows two metal people set into a stone hill and there are timeless as they stand there on top of the world evoking exactly the feeling you get if you stand above Uffington's White Horse and look out with the wind whipping past you. It's elemental, age-old and has that spiritual quality the judges were looking for. Jo Boseley, Sculpture Judge, said "For me, the piece that best answered the theme 'spirit of the Ridgeway' was 'Me and my son' by Michelle Greene. The shape of the stone on which the figures stood reflected the gentle contours of the hills, while the two figures emphasized the majesty of the downland landscape. Looking at the two stick figures one could almost feel the wind blowing and recall the exhilaration of being 'on top of the world', the downs giving way to fields and villages below as far as the eye can see".

The runner up in the sculpture category was carved by John Nicholls, a buzzard on a stone backdrop with a hole that could be the sun or the moon and leaves you wondering, just as the mysteries of the Ridgeway do – and it's an abstract representation of the ridgeway, giving this depiction go the Ridgeway a freedom and a flavour of adventure.

In the written category, the poem, by Peter Wild, was a unanimous choice. Clover Stroud the written work judge, described it "as the most original. It had rich emotional resonance, with the horse described in a way that rang true, and the poem giving the feel of the ridgeway as a space that is used, the wind providing the lift for kites, as a space where you're aware of the passing of time and generation visit, pass and visit again".

Esther Lafferty presented the prizes to the winners. After the prize giving there was a cream tea for all at the exhibition. We were all delighted with the success of the Art Prize over the week-end. For this the Friends of the Ridgeway owe a real debt of gratitude for all the hard work and organisation, to the volunteers involved. A very big thank you to all who helped.

Anthony Burdall

As part of the activities for the Ridgeway Friends day on 28 April 2019, there was a much appreciated display of 17th century country dancing by the Vale Islanders.

The Vale Islanders

The Vale Islanders is a group of dancers and musicians who perform Playford English country dances of the Seventeenth Century in the costume of the period. The group started in the village of Charney Basset in 1995. Our name reflects our roots in the island villages of the Vale of White Horse and our dancing aims to reflect the dances of the ordinary people of the Vale 350 years ago. The dances are taken from 'The English Dancing Master' first published by John Playford in 1651. This contains instructions for 105 dances along with the tune for each dance.

We mostly come from the villages in the Vale of the White Horse, which were once called the Islands in the Vale.



Hundreds of years ago the land in our area was much wetter than it is now and the pieces of land the villages are now on were just islands in a very marshy place. The Ridgeway was the only guaranteed dry road.

John Playford was the first person to collect and write down English country dances and tunes, and publish them. From a copy of his book, we try to work out what his directions mean; language has changed since the seventeenth century.

The mid seventeenth century was a period in which much was happening in this area. The Civil Wars were in progress and

there were battles, skirmishes and sieges all over the Vale. We aim to portray people trying to enjoy themselves, in spite of hard times. And try to dress as ordinary people would have at the time. The clothes are surprisingly comfortable and practical. We buy them at special markets or make them ourselves. The shoes are an investment, like any pair of shoes, but good value for handmade leather items, and very comfortable. The group has a store of clothing, from which we lend to new members until they really 'get the bug' and start making for themselves.

The music is not so easy to do in an authentic way. Early modern instruments are often temperamental and they would have sounded odd to modern ears. Even the tuning was different. For convenience we often use modern folk instruments but do have a selection of Period instruments; a fiddle, a hurdy gurdy, a citterne, bagpipe and recorders which are brought out when conditions are suitable.

We enjoy our dancing and music. Some members do a lot of historical re-enacting and enjoy talking about the times and the way people lived. We dance at village fetes and social evenings all around the area for a small fee. More information is on our web site at <https://www.vale-islanders.org.uk/>.

Dianne Godfrey

Horseback on the Ridgeway

The majority of horse riders and carriage drivers use the Ridgeway as part of a circular route from near to where they keep their horse. But this spring saw horse riders enjoying the Ridgeway from farther afield.



Emma and Charlotte reach Ivinghoe Beacon

In late April, Emma Bowyer and Charlotte from Devon rode from Overton Hill right through to Ivanhoe Beacon over 7 days covering 103 miles even though the Ridgeway National Trail does not officially cater for horse riders east of Streatley. They stayed at bed and breakfasts which cater for horses but otherwise carried everything they needed for their trip on their trusty steeds Floyd and Maddy. They raised £733 for the charity Ride High which gives children the opportunity to interact with horses to build their self-esteem and confidence (<https://www.ridehigh.org>).



The Adams family on the Trail

Shortly after, three generations of the Adams family rode in the opposite direction from Streatley to Overton Hill over 3 days again staying in horse bed and breakfasts: James aged 8 rode his little pony Charmer, Eleanor aged 11 rode Bruno, mum Kirsty rode Dougal and Gramps Ian rode his bike! This time the weather was not so kind with rain on the first day. Even so, they stuck at it and £382 raised for Cancer Research UK, a charity dear to their heart as Ian has been suffering from liver cancer. This was surely a trip which will stay with the family's memory for a very long time.

Earlier in April, a horse orienteering ride was held from Bury Down, West Ilsley, organized by Wessex Trec, with 19 riders coming from the Cotswolds and Surrey to test their map reading skills. £320 was raised which will go towards improving equestrian paths and gates in the area.

So, during the month of April, the Ridgeway National Trail raised over a magnificent £1,400 for good causes while providing memorable challenges for horse riders and possibly also their trusty

steeds.

Full accounts of both rides can be found by joining the 'Ridgeway Horse Riders and Carriage Drivers Access Group' on Facebook and a YouTube video of the Adams' adventure can be seen on YouTube.

Janice Bridger

Finally

The next Newsletter is due in the autumn (hopefully mid-October) so if you have anything you would like to be included please let us know.
