



THE FRIENDS OF THE
RIDGEWAY

Annual Report 2020

Preserving the Spirit of The Ridgeway



About Us:

Our Mission:

- To **preserve** the ridgeway, including The Ridgeway National Trail, 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; this is the Great Chalk Way.

Our Vision for The Ridgeway National Trail:

- 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;
- A properly maintained route, with excellent access, signage, facilities and information, not over-used or abused, benefitting everyone.

Our Role: To campaign for the protection of the whole length of the ancient ridgeway, and to promote its value to the whole community as an essential part of everyone's life and heritage.

We work with the Ridgeway Partnership and others to ensure that The Ridgeway National Trail is properly maintained and protected as an essential facility and a vital element in the national network of recreational trails. We also 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.

From the Chairman

Dear Friends

What a year. Reviewing the last year is like reviewing a car crash.



And yet, it was the year we had confirmed the vital importance of our trail. There has been an increased number of visitors emphasising the importance of the trail to those who live along its route, providing contact with the outdoor environment for health and wellbeing. It is a vital resource which we must protect for future generations and the inevitable issues they will face.

But increased visitors have led to additional wear and tear. Many parts of The Ridgeway National Trail have suffered damage to the surfacing which will have to be renovated in the coming years. It is possible that we shall have to take the lead in a fund raising campaign for resurfacing costs.

Most disappointingly, there has been an increase in the number of incidences of undesirable activities. Perhaps many came about as the result of a lack of understanding of how to engage positively with the natural environment, rather than by deliberate acts of damage. Nonetheless many were deliberate, illegal, or just inconsiderate, use of motor vehicles along the trail.

If all visitors to the countryside followed the simple guidelines in the Countryside Code, many if not all of the issues that occur on the trail would simply not happen. Everyone would be able to benefit from and enjoy the countryside.

Also, Covid-19 has created all manner of challenges for the trail management team. Events have been cancelled with consequential adverse effects on funding. Keeping people safe on the trail has been a continuing concern. Providing access to the trail with car parks closed was an early problem. Undertaking routine maintenance of the trail was impeded. But The Ridgeway National Trail is blessed with an excellent Trail Officer in Sarah Wright who has worked tirelessly to cope with these concerns.

Over the past year a variety of continuing issues have been noted. These have been reported in Newsletters over the year. Some have been resolved, some seem impossible to resolve and some we continue towards resolution.



There have been continuing reports of illegal use of motor vehicles on the trail by 4X4s and trail bikes; incidents have increased over the last year perhaps in part due to the general increased usage of The Ridgeway.



For example, damage was noted at Gramps Hill where treated sewage has been delivered using The Ridgeway as the access road for large lorries. The delivery damaged the surface of the trail and left it a deep muddy track.



Trail bikes seem to have been a particular issue with young people riding on the trail causing nuisance although, fortuitously, not serious injury. A group of young riders were reported at several places along the trail one Sunday. One reporter commented she had *“intercepted four obnoxious and very selfish motorbike scramblers weaving their bikes through hundreds of families (the car park was overflowing). As we live near the Ridgeway, we have heard the scrambling bikes at night through this covid period but this is the first time we have encountered them on a busy day”*.



Another particularly nasty episode occurred earlier this year. A lone lady horse rider met a group of 5 off-road trail bikers. She reports she *“heard the riders shouting and revving their engines and luckily*

managed to pull in off the main Ridgeway onto the track that runs between the main Compton Gallops. I was wearing full high viz and it would not have been hard to see me. They all paused for a moment before racing past the track where I was, doing wheelies and shouting. My horse reared right up as she was so scared, but luckily didn't slip and I managed to stay on. I shouted to ask them to stop, but their bikes were so noisy they wouldn't have heard me". The horse, a well schooled 16 year old, safe, kind horse, was very distressed. It could have had a very different ending.

A different report concerned alleged hunt activities. Although no evidence was available, it was reported that horses and dogs were rampaging across the fields, scaring the sheep and deer. The informant asked why we allowed this to happen and if we got paid for it? Whilst concerns about fox hunting are understood, it is not up to us to allow or disallow activities on The Ridgeway National Trail. All we can do is report legal infringements to the relevant authorities who will take action. And, for the avoidance of doubt, we do not take payment and never have and never will.

Reports of illegal parking and/or encampments on the trail continue to come in. Recent incidents include a converted horsebox being used as domestic accommodation just up the trail from Overton Hill. The issue of a seemingly permanent dweller on The Ridgeway just south of Ildstone continues; once the present coronavirus issues subside, we will press the matter with the County Council responsible for that section of the trail. Also we had a report from the local Parish Council about cars parked on The Ridgeway at the Chinnor Crossing.

These issues are typical of the matters brought to our attention – sometimes directly but increasingly often via our web site contact page at <https://www.ridgewayfriends.org.uk/contact-us/> or via our Facebook page. If you note any issues along the trail please do bring them to our attention, preferably with a full description of the issue and photographs. We will continue to pursue the issues to protect the trail.

Hopefully the efforts of the Thames Valley Police will be rewarded with convictions in due course. It makes me angry that people cannot use The

Ridgeway in the way intended, in peace, without being attacked by illegal trail bikers or other anti-social behaviour.

But there is also good news to report.

For many of us, The Ridgeway is a lot more than a walking trail – it is a historic monument, an archaeological treasure and, certainly for me, an artistic inspiration. This perception led to us establishing the Swire Ridgeway Arts Prize. One unfortunate consequence of the Covid-19 lock down was the cancellation of the Swire Ridgeway Arts Prize 2020 and associated Ridgeway Friends Day, including the AGM. However, it will be held in 2021 with an online exhibition.

And we continue to work with others to create a coast-to-coast recreational route for walkers, riders and cyclists, including disabled access, along the line of the ancient ridgeway braided tracks between Norfolk and Dorset. This is the Great Chalk Way.

The AGM will be held on Sunday 25 April 2021 as an online event. It will be followed, again as an online event, by the Prize Giving for the Swire Ridgeway Arts Prize. Definitely a date for your diary – please do try to join us if you can.

Over the past year, several Trustees have resigned. Sadly Andy Greenhalgh lost his battle against cancer and passed away. Due to serious illness of her daughter, Dianne Godfrey had to resign and Carole Ruse left to pursue other interests. However, we are delighted to welcome Michael Lewington, Edward Peveler, Nathan Boyd and Jane Imbush who have volunteered as Trustees, been co-opted and will stand for election at the AGM.

Due to family issues, I shall not stand for re-election as Chairman at the AGM. Hence, this is the last Chairman's letter I shall write. The first, written over 5 years ago, reported at a pivotal point for the Friends of the Ridgeway and the trail.

Much of the use of motor vehicles on green lanes, including the Ridgeway, was extinguished by the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act, 2006. The Ridgeway Partnership had just been formed securing, it was

hoped, the future of the trail with funding for maintenance and development promised from Natural England. The first event I attended on behalf of the Friends of the Ridgeway was the official launch of the Ridgeway Partnership.



But this huge success led to a question about the future objectives for the Friends of the Ridgeway; should the organisation be wound up having achieved its objectives or should it carve out a new role for itself? The Friends of the Ridgeway are the only stakeholder in the partnership whose remit includes the whole trail. And furthermore it is possible to envisage a scenario when the security of the trail is under threat.

In my opinion, The Ridgeway is a wonderful resource for all the communities that live along its route as well as to the wider community; this resource must be preserved and protected for future generations and its benefits brought to the attention of as many people as possible. This, I suggest, is the present and future role the Friends of the Ridgeway must play.

It has been an honour to have served as your Chairman and, I hope, played a part in ensuring the ridgeway is protected for future generations.

I wish to continue to enjoy my, albeit short, walks along the path with my camera; if you see an old man wandering along, stopping to take photographs, please say 'Hello'.

With all best wishes
Anthony Burdall

Secretary's report

The Friends of the Ridgeway is a voluntary association and a registered charity. In order to fulfil its charitable objectives, eight trustees are elected annually at the AGM. These form an executive committee that, in addition to individual trustees delivering on various roles throughout the year, meets quarterly. The chairman of the Friends sits on the board of the Ridgeway Partnership, which is the statutory board that protects, maintains and promotes the enjoyment and appreciation of The Ridgeway National Trail by the general public.

During the past year several trustees retired. We thank them for contributing so much to the success of the Friends of the Ridgeway. Dave Cavanagh was elected as a trustee at the AGM, and Duncan Strutt was co-opted in June. Consequently at the end of the year the trustees comprised Anthony Burdall (Chairman), Dave Cavanagh (Secretary), Tim Lewis (Treasurer and Membership Secretary), Jim Gunter and Duncan Strutt. We have commenced the production of a risk register, to increase the resilience of the association.

Our meetings followed a typical pattern because of COVID-19: the first one was in the Court Hill Centre above Wantage; the remainder were held online. The Ridgeway Officer, Sarah Wright, attended all four of our meetings, which expedited communication and mutual cooperation.

We continued to publish three newsletters plus an Annual Review ahead of the AGM in April. Our Facebook page and website were particularly useful in respect of people giving feedback.

We are most grateful to artist Anna Dillon who produced our wonderful new logo and one for the Cranbourne Drovers Way, part of the Great Chalk Way. Thanks, too, to our webmaster Ricky Cunningham who oversaw the rebuilding of our website.

And if you have changed your email address please let us know the new address.

Dave Cavanagh

NOTICE OF THE 2021 ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING
To be held online on Sunday 25th April at 3.00 pm.

Notice is hereby given that the 2021 AGM will be held on Sunday 25 April 2021 at 3.00pm via Zoom. Links for the Zoom meeting will be sent to all members with an email address no later than 18 April 2021.

Nominations for the election of Officers and Trustees and items for Any Other Business should be sent in writing or by e-mail to the Secretary by 14 full days before the Meeting (i.e. by 11 April 2021).

Copies of the formal papers, with the Minutes of the 2020 AGM, will be sent by email to those members who have a registered email address. If you have not given us an email address and would like copies of the papers, please contact the Secretary, at the address below:

Post: Waylands, Shotover Corner, Uffington, Faringdon Oxon SN7 7RH.

Email: davecavanagh1000@gmail.com.

The winners of the Swire Ridgeway Arts Prize will be announced at the prize giving after the AGM. The 2021 Arts Prize will be an online exhibition. The exhibition will be open on line at our web site from Sunday 18 April 2021.



Treasurer's Report for the year to 31 December 2020

In common with all other charities, we have been affected by the Covid-19 pandemic, with a beneficial financial effect that we have been able largely to retain our cash reserves.

It is interesting to note that without the large donations received totalling £15,000, last year's result would have been a deficit of £4,211. This is comparable with this year's deficit of £3,745, but this year the Swire Arts Prize was not held, the deficit on which last year, plus a decline in subscriptions received, accounts for most of the difference.

Whilst suffering a deficit is not normally a desirable outcome for a charity, the Trustees felt that it was important to continue to support the Ridgeway Partnership in this extraordinary year, and also to revitalise our website, as this is our 'window on the world'. Our reserves, both restricted and unrestricted, continue to be at a comfortable level.

The decline in subscriptions received is attributable partly to members not renewing their subscriptions, probably because of the Covid-19 situation. A consequence of reduced subscriptions is that the Gift Aid recoverable has decreased by £123.

Interest of £140 was received on the maturity of the CAF 12 Month Fixed Rate Saver Issue 2, and the £10,000 principal was reinvested in a one year fixed rate bond with United Trust Bank.

A donation £3,500 was made to the Ridgeway Partnership towards the cost of its maintenance volunteer scheme. Our website was badly in need of being 'refreshed' to make it more attractive to users and easier to amend in future, and this cost £1,314. Waymarks for the Cranborne Drove Way, which is an essential link in the Great Chalk Way chain, were purchased during the year at a cost of £435, and have since been fixed along the route. Another one-off expense was the cost of a Zoom licence, which is needed to be able to hold trustee meetings and the Annual General Meeting virtually rather than physically.

Tim Lewis
Treasurer

Friends of the Ridgeway : Accounts for the year ended 31 December 2020
Income and expenditure account for the year ended 31 December 2020

	2020	2019
Income		
Subscriptions	1,599	2,056
Donations	957	15,774
Tax recoverable through Gift Aid	362	485
Swire Arts Day sales		425
Surplus on closure of Vale of White Horse group	230	
Interest earned	140	130
Total	3,288	18,870
Expenditure		
Ridgeway Partnership support	3,500	3,995
Swire Arts Prize set up & prizes		2,292
Newsletters/Annual report	646	690
Insurance	345	345
Website/IT costs	1,596	260
Local & group events		242
Cranborne Doves Way waymarks	435	
Meeting expenses	132	138
Bank charges	60	60
Zoom licence	144	
Publicity	110	
Affiliation fees	36	36
Other	29	23
Total	7,033	8,081
(Deficit)/surplus for the year	(3,745)	10,789
Fund balances brought forward	62,030	51,241
Fund balances carried forward	58,285	62,030



Friends of the Ridgeway : Accounts for the year ended 31 December 2020
Balance sheet at 31 December 2020

	2020	2019
Current assets		
Bank balances		
CAF bank account	47,923	51,236
Deposit with United Trust Bank	10,000	
CAF Bank Investment account		10,000
Other balances		309
Total	57,923	61,545
Gift Aid recoverable from HMRC	362	485
	58,285	62,030
Represented by Funds		
Unrestricted – General Fund	23,383	23,171
Restricted – Ridgeway National Trail	16,178	19,688
Restricted – Swire Arts Exhibitions	14,977	14,977
Restricted – Great Chalk Way	3,747	4,194
	58,285	62,030

The Swire Ridgeway Arts Prize:

Following strong support over past years, the competition is established as an annual event. Separate classes are open to works of painting, photography, sculpture (including ceramics) and writing (poetry or prose). Competition is open to all, amateur and professional artists.

The 2021 Arts Prize will be an online exhibition. The exhibition will open online at our web site at <https://ridgewayfriends.org.uk/swire-ridgeway-arts-prize/> from Sunday 18 April 2021 with the Prize Giving online via Zoom on Sunday 25 April 2021.

We hope that the Arts Prize will again be a successful event celebrating the artistic inspiration of the Ridgeway, albeit not in the form we would like.

Anthony Burdall

The Great Chalk Way:

The Friends of the Ridgeway have teamed up with the Icknield Way Association, Dorset Council and Norfolk Council to create a long distance coast to coast route, the Great Chalk Way. It stretches from Lyme Regis on the Dorset coast to Hunstanton on The Wash, and makes use of much of the Wessex Ridgeway (which is in the care of Dorset Council), the Ridgeway National Trail, the Icknield Way Path and Peddars Way (a National Trail managed by Norfolk Council). The section from Win Green in south-west Wiltshire to the start of The Ridgeway National Trail near Avebury follows a new trail to Salisbury through the Cranborne Chase Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, which we have named the Cranborne Doves Way, and then parts of the Pewsey Avon Trail and the White Horse Trail to join up with The Ridgeway National Trail.

The Great Chalk Way follows ancient braided tracks along the chalk ridges which have been used by many generations to drive animals to market, and as a highway safe from the vagaries of the weather beneath it, and from the threat of fierce creatures and highwaymen. It has often been referred to as the 'oldest road in Britain'. As its component long distance paths are keen to preserve their own identity, we view it as a 'family of trails' linked together by a common desire to promote the Great Chalk Way as an accessible southern coast to coast route full of variety, lovely scenery and ancient history.

Progress in creating the Great Chalk Way in 2020 has not surprisingly been severely curtailed by the Covid-19 pandemic. However, we have been able to finalise the route of the Cranborne Doves Way, and to waymark it and write detailed directions for it. A website has been set up for it too, at <http://greatchalkway.org.uk/>, but this is very much a work-in-progress and should not be relied on to plan walks. The next step is to design information boards to be erected at the start and finish of the component paths, which is now under way.

Tim Lewis

The Ridgeway National Trail: It was only natural that, when the National Trails were established, the ridgeway should take its place amongst these premier routes. Only the central section of 87 miles between Ivinghoe

Beacon and Overton Hill was 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 a wonderful experience not only for walkers and local residents, but for visitors and families seeking the best of rural England.

The Ridgeway Partnership: The Ridgeway Partnership was established in 2015 to take responsibility to Natural England for the management, promotion and improvement of The Ridgeway National Trail. The 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 volunteers who, with the Chiltern Society and Ramblers work 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 raise awareness of The Ridgeway as an important recreational and leisure facility and of its unique heritage and environmental characteristics, and to work closely with landowners and local communities to increase economic benefits from tourism. It has identified five themes or aspects of The Ridgeway's unique appeal, namely the Natural, Living, Ancient, Sporting and Creative Ridgeway, to highlight its wildlife and biodiversity; the superb landscape and scenery; good food, country pubs and services; sporting events and family recreation; its wealth of heritage and pre-history; and inspiration for art and literature. To walk on The Ridgeway can improve physical and mental health, as well as enjoyment of peace and quiet.

The Ridgeway Partnership is working with other National Trails to ensure financial stability for core management and maintenance costs, and to mobilise additional funding for promotion and development.

The Friends of the Ridgeway: The Facts

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

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

Committee: The Trustees of The Friends of the Ridgeway, elected annually to run the Association, comprise a Committee, which includes the Chairman, Secretary and Treasurer.

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.

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 to be so classified.

Communications: We operate a web site at <https://ridgewayfriends.org.uk/> which is available to promote our own activities and those of our many associate organisations. We publish a quarterly Newsletter in electronic format. We also have a presence in social media; follow us on Facebook and Twitter.



How You Can Help:

Join Us: Become a member of the Friends of the Ridgeway.

Volunteer: We're always looking for helpers.

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. 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

Patron: Sir Chris Bonington

President: Lord Bradshaw

Vice-Presidents: MPs whose constituency includes the Ridgeway:

Robert Buckland MP

Rob Butler MP

Laura Farris MP

John Howell MP

David Johnston MP

Danny Kruger MP

Gagan Mohindra MP

Trustees (to 25 April 2021):

Anthony Burdall Chairman (anthony.burdall@burdall.net)

Dave Cavanagh Secretary (davecavanagh1000@gmail.com)

Tim Lewis Treasurer (timwhlewis@gmail.com)

Duncan Strutt Trustee

Jim Gunter Trustee

Michael Lewington Trustee

Edward Peveler Trustee

Nathan Boyd Trustee

Jane Imbush Trustee

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

Principal Address: 2 Fernham Road, Faringdon, Oxon SN7 7JY

Registered Charity No. 1107926