

A group of four people and a dog are standing on a grassy hill, looking out over a valley. In the sky above them, a colorful rainbow kite is flying. The scene is set against a clear blue sky with some light clouds. The people are dressed in casual outdoor clothing, and the dog is a medium-sized, light-colored breed.

# Friends of the Ridgeway

Summer 2021



# SUMMER 2021

[www.ridgewayfriends.org.uk](http://www.ridgewayfriends.org.uk)



@FriendsOfTheRidgeway

Editor Dave Cavanagh



Articles were written by the editor unless credited otherwise.

If you have an idea for an article on some aspect, including your own experience, of the Ridgeway or its environs, or on another section of the Great Chalk Way, do discuss it with the editor [davecavanagh1000@gmail.com](mailto:davecavanagh1000@gmail.com)

Got some great photos on the Ridgeway or nearby countryside, villages and events? Do share them with us: email them to the editor.

Cover photo: family kite-flying on White Horse Hill, Uffington. Photo: Dave Cavanagh

## Welcome

**FRIENDS OF THE RIDGEWAY** has a link with Harry Kane no less, captain of the England football team which kept us increasingly enthralled in June and July. OK, I admit it; the link is tenuous. *Very* tenuous. Harry was nurtured in his early career by Ridgeway Rovers FC, whose ground is in Ridgeway Park, Chingford, East London. The club also had another very famous protégé: David Beckham. And, no, I do not know what

connection Ridgeway Park has with the Ridgeway for which the Friends exists. Quite possibly none. Still, I couldn't let that opportunity slip by.

As I write this, in the second half of July, summer has actually got going, with temperatures consistently above 20C. A far cry from the start of the year when the privations of winter were compounded by another COVID-19 lockdown.

**THE START** of spring coincided with preparations for our AGM which, inevitably, was held by Zoom. COVID-19 also affected the staging of our Swire Ridgeway Arts Prize, which we also had to hold online. Our thanks to Ricky Cunningham, our webmaster, for putting the record number of entries on the website, and to Anthony Burdall who liaised with the writers, sculptors, photographers and painters, and generally drove the Arts Prize forward.

Speaking of Anthony, family reasons necessitated his retiring as chair of the Friends and, indeed, as a trustee, at the AGM. He has been an extremely effective chair. One of his many roles was editor of this newsletter, a mantle that I have taken on. He also sought a successor for the post of chair, and additional trustees. In these endeavours he was entirely successful. Later in this newsletter our new chair, Mike Lewington, introduces himself and the trustees.

*Dave Cavanagh*



# East Ilsley Fair

East Ilsley is a little town  
Hid from the world, of small renown,  
That, nestling in the shelt'ring Down,  
Has fallen fast asleep.

But Ilsley wakens once a year  
When those who dip and dress and shear,  
From many a distant hill farm drear,  
Come down to sell their sheep.

The pens are filled with bleating flocks  
While ancient shepherds, clad in smocks,  
With oft-repeated crow-bar knocks  
Make every pen secure.

**ILSLEY IS A VILLAGE** less than a mile southwest of the Ridgeway. Being adjacent to the A34, it is not as sleepy as in 1927. (Although that state can be restored by drinking in both of the remaining pubs, one after the other.) The village is now situated just within the northern boundary of West Berkshire. Until the boundary changes of 1974, when Oxfordshire expanded southwards to bloodlessly annex a chunk of what, up to that point, was simply Berkshire, it was well within Berkshire. A small sheep market dates back there to the 13<sup>th</sup> century although from the 17<sup>th</sup> century it became a weekly event in spring and summer. As many as 80,000 sheep could be auctioned in a single day. The last fair was held in 1934.

Their talk is all of shepherd dogs,  
Of shearling gimmers, tegs and hogs,  
And husking caused by autumn fogs,  
The latest foot-rot cure.

And how the lambing season's gone,  
And how the late weaned lambs have done,  
How many ewes have had but one,  
And how new puppies train.

But when the last departing sheep  
Are driven up the chalk roads steep,  
Grey shadows from the downland creep,  
And Ilsley sleeps again.

*From the Book 'Berkshire Vale'. Poems by Wilfred Howe-Nurse, illustrations by Cecil Aldin. Published by Basil Blackwell, Oxford (1927)*

Since you ask:

Gimmer – a young female sheep

Teg – a young male sheep

Hog – a ram

Husking – coughing

## Homework. Remember that?

The homework on the following pages must have brought a smile to the faces of the teachers. Or had they seen it all before?



East Ilsley High Street. Photo courtesy of East Ilsley Parish Council.

**THE FEEL-GOOD** factor of events on the Ridgeway is even more valued after a year of struggling with the COVID-19 pandemic. So far this year, several events have taken place safely and successfully and another 11 are scheduled to go ahead between

now and November. The year started well with the first event on the Ridgeway in April. The Aylesbury-based charity PACE, which provides innovative education for children with sensory motor disorders, raised over £30,000 through its BIG

Walk event. Two running events followed in May which turned out to be the UK's wettest May on record, but the runners' spirits weren't dampened too much.

The first in May was the Chiltern Ridge Ultra. One runner from 'Farnham Runners' has posted a frank but inspiring

# Events are once again underway on the Ridgeway

Sarah Wright

Ridgeway National Trail Project Officer

story online about her experience, including the highs and lows of training during a pandemic:

<https://www.farnham-runners.org.uk/press-releases/2021/chiltern-ridge-trail-ultra/>. She says, "Join a running club, you will make life-long friends and do things you never thought you'd be able to do." Later in the month it was a new event called the Goring Gap Run, which saw 550 runners doing a loop using the Ridgeway alongside the River Thames.

**THE RIDGEWAY** 2021 events calendar reflects the range of uses enjoyed by the public on the Trail - walking, running, cycling, horse riding, carriage driving and motorcycle riding. Professionally organised events provide a great opportunity for the public to try new activities and learn about responsible use.

You can see the Ridgeway events calendar at [www.nationaltrail.co.uk/en\\_GB/trails/the-ridgeway/news/](http://www.nationaltrail.co.uk/en_GB/trails/the-ridgeway/news/)

**Events on the Ridgeway** are not only of benefit to the participants and the charities for whom they may be raising money, they are also of benefit to all users of the Ridgeway, as most event organisers donate £1 per participant to Friends of the Ridgeway, which is then directed towards maintenance work on the Trail.



Goring Gap Run runners walking out of the social distancing pen.

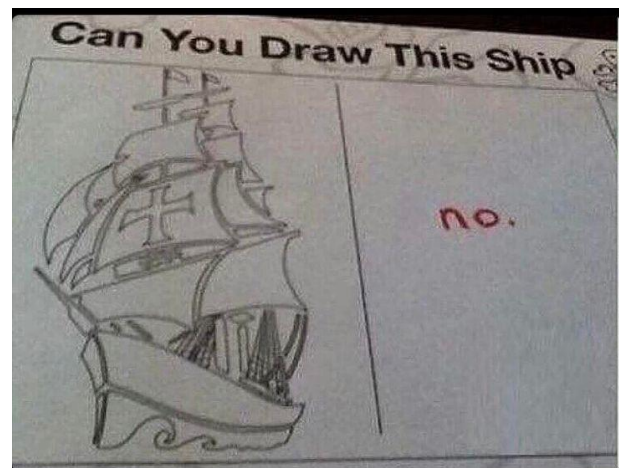
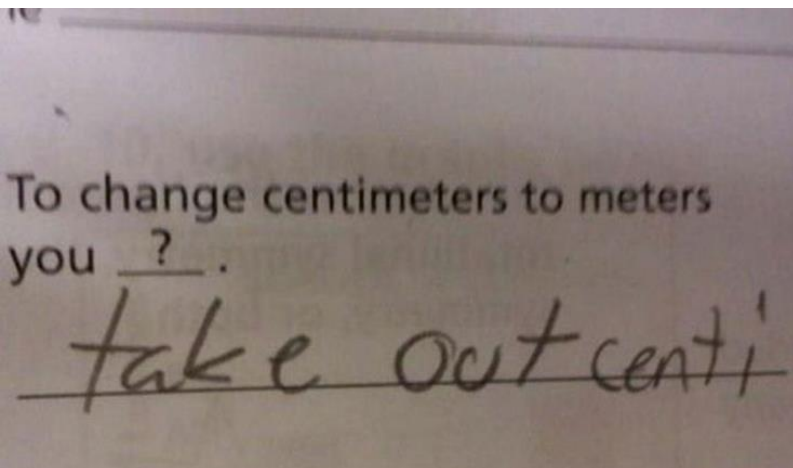


# Send in your best photos

**IN FUTURE ISSUES** of this newsletter we shall have a theme and we invite you, our members, to submit your best photos on each theme for inclusion in it. You don't have to limit yourself to photos taken literally of or on the Ridgeway; they can be from anywhere within the Ridgeway corridor. This can be loosely

interpreted as the space between the Trail and nearby villages and towns on either side. It very much includes these habitations, which have attractive features in their own right and may also be the starting point for walks, refreshments in pubs and cafes, and accommodation.

The theme for the autumn issue is 'In the sky'. This would include kite flying, hang gliding, balloons, clouds and birds in motion. You might have captured something else. Send your photos to me by 10th October, with your name, so that you will be acknowledged, and tell me where you took them. [davecavanagh1000@gmail.com](mailto:davecavanagh1000@gmail.com)



The Downs near Ashbury in Oxfordshire, though it is near the border with Wiltshire. The photo was taken on the d'Arcy Dalton Way, which has its southern terminus a little towards the left, on the Ridgeway. Photo: Dave Cavanagh.



# Ridgeway volunteers are back in action

Most people, as they move along the Ridgeway, probably never give a moment's thought to the ease with which they move along it. They simply take it for granted that the way is clear. That this is the case is largely down to a team of volunteers armed with saws (manual and mechanical), secateurs, brush and hedge cutters, and mowers. The same volunteers also maintain parts of the Thames Path National Trail.

As COVID-19 restrictions were lifted the volunteers got back to the trails, starting with mowing and brush cutting to keep the route clear of long grass, nettles etc. After the bird-nesting season is over the volunteers will address major signage issues and cut back encroaching scrub.



A major element of the summer maintenance of the Ridgeway by volunteers is mowing the verges along the trail. The mowers not only have a voracious appetite for nettles and other herbaceous perennials and grasses but they will also chomp through young hawthorn and blackthorn saplings.



The volunteers for both of these National Trails are led by Volunteer Coordinator Lucy Duerdoth. The Ridgeway Partnership contributes towards the cost of one day per week of Lucy's time on the Ridgeway and associated costs i.e. insurance, equipment, vehicle, petrol. The Friends of the Ridgeway donated to the Partnership to cover the associated costs in 2020/21.

Lucy's base is near Eynsham and includes a workshop where she and volunteers make Trail signs and store and maintain equipment and materials.

**FOLLOWING** the devastating disappointment of having to cancel the Swire Ridgeway Arts Prize in March 2020, there was a determination to hold it in 2021. In the event it was not possible to have a physical exhibition; the 2021 Arts Prize was an

online exhibition. The exhibition opened on The Friends of the Ridgeway [website](#) from Sunday 18 April 2021, with the Prize Giving online via Zoom on Sunday 25 April 2021.

The exhibition remains open – select 2021 from the dropdown menu under the Arts Prize tab on the website

# The Swire Ridgeway Arts Prize

Anthony Burdall



**THE LARGEST** entry previously for the Swire Ridgeway Arts Prize was 97. But for 2021 there was a most welcome huge increase in entries with a total entry of 182 works made up of 7 Written, 19 Sculpture, 30 Photographs and 122 Wall Art. As in previous years, there was a considerable variety of

works entered, including some wonderful textile pictures. Whilst entries came predominantly from the Wiltshire and Oxfordshire Ridgeway corridor, there were entries from Berkshire, Buckinghamshire and Hampshire; on this occasion there were not more entries from further afield.

**IT TOOK** some time to sort out the details for the exhibition and to mount it online; a big thank you is due to the web team that worked to make it happen. All works entered

were exhibited, making a wonderful and varied exhibition of art works inspired by the Ridgeway.

But the entry led to wondering why the substantial increase in entries. Is it because the Arts Prize is becoming better known? Is it because it was an online exhibition making preparation of the works for submission less costly as there is little or no framing, printing, mounting and the like? Is it due to the pandemic lock down giving more time for art work? Feedback was requested from artists who submitted works for the Arts Prize but inevitably there was

not one but a range of reasons. None ascribed the entry as being due to COVID or the lockdown, although they had had more time to do their art. The most common reason for entering this year was that they had only just heard of the Arts Prize – if they had known about it before, they would have entered. The conclusion is that it is all about the publicity and hence, hopefully, numbers of entries may continue to grow.



**THE RESULTS** of the competition were announced and prizes awarded at the Prize Giving via Zoom. The distinguished panel of Judges were:

**CHAIR OF JUDGES:** Lucy Stopford. She is a renowned professional artist and Chairman of the Oxford Art Society, Co-ordinator of the Jericho Artweeks Lecture, and Fellow of the Royal Society of Arts

**WRITTEN WORK JUDGE:** Clover Stroud. 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

**SCULPTURE JUDGE:** Johannes Von Stumm. He is a renowned professional sculpture and Past President Royal Society of Sculptors, President Oxford Art Society, Founding Member of Sculpture Network (Europe), Deutscher Künstlerbund

**PHOTOGRAPHIC JUDGE:** Melita Kyle. A professional fine art photographer who enjoys capturing moments, nature and flowers alongside interiors and styling indoor shoots

**WALL ART JUDGE:** Jane Strother. A contemporary painter, art tutor and mentor and board member of Oxford Art Weeks



The overall winner of the Swire Ridgeway Arts Prize 2021 was Carole Barfoot for her written work 'The Traveller'. However, there was considerable debate within the judging

panel and a split vote on the overall winner with Jonathan Lipinski for his photograph 'Ridgeway with crows' being very much in consideration.

The category winners are:

### Photography

17	Jonathan Lipinski	Ridgeway with crows	Winner
25	Jim Richie	The Ridgeway morning mist	Runner-up
5	David Castle	White Horse	Highly Commended

### Sculpture

2	Wendy Ball	Life on the Ridgeway	Winner
14	Mary Thorne	Sunrise on the Ridgeway	Runner-up
8	Kim Pethybridge	Running Moon Hare	Highly Commended

### Writing

2	Carole Barfoot	The Traveller	Winner
4	Russell Holland	Ridgeway	Runner-up
1	Susan Adamson	Above and Beneath our Feet	Highly Commended

### Wall Art

61	Nicky Moeran	Where the journey never ends	Winner
105	Sally Turner	Spring on the Ridgeway	Runner-up
88	Maia Sissons	White Horse Hill Looking over the eye	Highly Commended
120	Emma Williams	Concertina Sketchbook 3	Highly Commended

**THE JUDGES** were impressed by the number, variety and quality of the entries and found it difficult to pick winners. The Chair of Judges, Lucy Stopford, in introducing the Prize Giving, said "It is an honour to present the prizes and a pleasure and a privilege to see such a magical place as the Ridgeway through the eyes of so many

Talented individuals. The Swire Prize offers a rare opportunity to celebrate creativity in so many forms. Congratulations to the individual judges for their insights and expertise and to you, the artists, for having created such an inclusive forum. No wonder the prize is going from strength to strength".

**COMMENTING** on 'The Traveller' by Carole Barfoot, Clover Stroud commented "I think it's a wonderful, surprising, deeply felt and imaginative piece of writing which has nods to contemporary life and is very original".

**WITH REGARD** to the winning photograph 'Ridgeway with crows', Melita Kyle commented that "the image showed technical ability with the use of a textured overlay (this is a layer you can place over an existing image to create an effect that fits the subject e.g. scratched metal, concrete, vintage film etc.). I feel it lends itself to this image which is almost reminiscent of a

painting similar to that of Constable. The composition is lovely, where the path sweeps away hugging the hedges bent from years of strong winds. Which is the perfect flow against the crows flying off to the right. The wooden signpost is something most walkers are familiar with seeing along the path which gives the image a sense of place".



Jonathan Lipinski *Ridgeway with crows* (photography)

Lots of lovely appreciative comments were received from artists who participated and without whom there would be no Arts Prize:

"I think it was so popular this year because creative people have longed to do worthwhile projects during lockdown".

"All the artworks look amazing and I am really pleased to be part of it".

"A real splash of creativity and a moral boost in these difficult times".

"Many thanks!"

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**THE SWIRE** Ridgeway Arts Prize was established with the aim of bringing the Ridgeway to life not only as a long distance trail but as an artistic inspiration, and to show the Ridgeway, its history and environs, in all their aspects throughout all seasons; to show the 'Spirit of the

Ridgeway'. Once again, even in difficult times it has shown this wonderful connection. 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.





Wendy Ball 'Life on the Ridgeway' (sculpture)



Nicky Moeran 'Where the journey never ends' (wall art)

# Carole Barfoot **The Traveller** (overall winner)

Winter.

I could see my breath as I exhaled hard at the effort in climbing the hill to the uppermost ridge. The Great Chalk Way.

I had woken with the cock-crow as the cold dawn sparkled with crystals of rimey frost edging the leaves of ivy growing around the house. It made me shiver just to see it. But a clear, bright beginning with a rose-coloured sky. The maid in my lodgings cooked me a filling breakfast of eggs and bread to see me on my way. I think she had a soft spot for me as she had given me an extra egg. But my mind was on other things and I had forgotten to give her my usual squeeze as a thank you.

I had dressed warmly to ward off the penetrating cold wind but had to remove my cloak on the climb as I began to sweat. My pack, slung round my shoulders, was heavy and unwieldy. The path to the top was barely visible through the trees and undergrowth but on reaching the trackway it opened out into a well-worn roadway with travellers walking in both directions even at that time of day. All ages, some like me on foot and others on donkeys or mules. The occasional cart stuck fast in the pot-holes, a wheel broken and much cursing coming from its owner. At the side of the track ice still held in puddles but mostly it had been smashed by hobnailed boots.

From the summit I could see for miles. I looked back towards Avebury and could see the great stones of the Circle. Pagan stones we believed, bringers of bad luck. For many years the villagers had tried to bury them but one of the stones had slipped and buried a man, a barber-surgeon. Tales in the village told of his screams as he realised the stone was falling but his efforts to escape were fruitless and the screams were replaced by a deafening silence as the monstrous weight entombed him forever. After that the villagers had no heart to continue burying the pagan monsters, the village was truly cursed. In the distance I could see the ditches on the top of Windmill Hill and the strange white cap of chalk on Silbury Hill. An odd feature its origin unknown to us. In summer the cattle would graze on its lower slopes whilst sheep followed winding paths to the summit.

I joined a small party of men all around my own age. It was better to travel in company as there are thieves and ragged vagabonds who would likely slit your throat, take your valuables and any money you are carrying and throw you into



the bushes at the side of the track. These lowlife ambush lone travellers, appearing suddenly out of the scrub. I didn't have any valuables and I had carefully sewn my money into the hem of my shirt and only carried a few groats in a small leather pouch around my neck hidden by my leather jerkin. I had walked this highway before and knew of its perils. I carried a small dagger in a leather sheath inside my jerkin which I could reach easily if needed.

To my right there was an area which had been cleared of trees. I could see into the valley and across an area of lowland. Buzzards soared high on the rising thermals, mewing their distinctive call to each other. Small hamlets were dotted in the landscape, a few brown fields close to dwellings waiting, as was I, for the warmth of Spring to swell the sown grain and ripen it in the heat of Summer. Thin streaks of smoke rose over the hamlets and I could imagine the work taking place in the houses and yards. The husband seeing to his animals, the wife churning butter or making a rough bread, the children collecting eggs and firewood. All the jobs essential in maintaining a healthy, if short life.

The banter amongst my companions increased and some groups had spontaneously burst into song. I joined in making me forget the small leak in my right boot, the pain from my chilblains and the itch between my toes. The miles started to quickly slip by. The sky had changed from its rosy hue and was now a clear blue, reflecting in the puddles where the ice had melted. Cloudless, with the slightest warmth on my face from the distant sun.

Hunger pains nagged in my stomach. We had climbed up to the old Barbury camp and walked through the ditches into an open area. The old folk talked of a battle here between our people and the invading Saxons. The Saxons won.

Our small group came to a stop and we found rocks by the side of the track where we could perch and tuck into our victuals. I had paid my landlord for a very large hunk of bread, cheese and ale which I carried in my leather bottle. A pair of kestrels hovered above us looking for their lunch.

I exchanged news with my new-found friends. Others travelling in the opposite direction stopped by us to eat and we gained information they had gathered en route. The best places to stay the night and the outrageous prices landlords charged for a straw mattress in a room occupied by a dozen other men. What the food was like - stale or riddled with weevil, did it give you a pain in your gut or worse still a trip to the outside midden in the middle of the night, kicking at the rats as they scampered past your legs annoyed at being disturbed. I had flinched at the thought.

News filtered through that our Gracious King Edward III was in mourning as his favourite daughter Joan had died in Bordeaux during the summer of 1348 on her way to marry Prince Pedro of Castille. Two of the King's infant sons had also died, such tragedy. His Queen, Phillipa of Hainault was in charge of the country during his absence, the Warrior King still warring.

I thought of my parents and my small nieces who had been taken by the Great Pestilence. The summer had been a terrible time for our village as the Pestilence made its way north from Melcombe near Weymouth. Many of the old folk and very young infants had been taken, enduring a painful but thankfully short time of suffering. My two brothers and I were spared. We were young and fit and fought the disease, but my parents and our priest, who nursed them, succumbed. I had not seen them for some time and as we were all sick at the same time I was unable to say goodbye to them. A great regret on my part. Many villages were completely wiped out during this plague and remained abandoned in fear of the disease lurking in the fabric of the homes.

Now, wintertime, it seemed to be abating and its spread had declined. Travellers from the North told us which places to avoid where the Pestilence had been at its worst. Luckily where I was heading, about thirty miles from my lodgings in Avebury, life had begun to return to a semblance of normality. But now there was a great shortage of labour as so many had died. Many fields remained unploughed and some animals had become wild with no-one to care for them. But with God's Grace our good life would return.

We picked up our pace. I wanted to cover about twelve miles on my first day and to find lodgings away from the path before darkness descended. I was expecting a three day walk to my destination but with dry weather and good drainage from the chalk track I should achieve that easily. We stood aside as a drover and his son, together with two dogs, tried to keep their twenty strong gaggle of geese disappearing off the track into the undergrowth on either side of the path. They pecked at late berries on withering plants and pulled at the long trailing leaves of grass which still held some goodness. The drovers were heading to market and hoped the geese would not lose too much weight on the walk. They were looking for top price for their flock. On their backs they carried withy hurdles to pen the gaggle at night. They would make camp overnight on the Way, lighting a small fire for warmth and to cook a meagre meal. It might be several days before they reached the market town of Wantage, at goose pace, to sell their Christmas fowl, live and very fresh.



I had recently completed my seven years apprenticeship indentured to Master Wright. He was a fair and knowledgeable Master and I felt confident in my skills. It hadn't been easy. Long hours, sore fingers, not much food for a lad that grew too fast and only a few days at Christmastide to see my sweetheart. She would be waiting for me at the end of my trek. We are to be married on Christmas Day and we will return to my home village of Letcombe Regis where we will live in my parents' cottage and pay our rent each quarter to our new Lord of the Manor, Nicholas de Oterbourne. A brook runs through the village where we can grow watercress and I will work for a new Master carpenter in Wantage only a mile away.

It was mid-afternoon and would soon be dark. I could see the village of Chiseldon down in the stony valley where I had lodged overnight before. I bade farewell to my band of companions and turned down the slope towards the old Icknield Way and headed for the small hostelry where I knew I would get a warm welcome, hot food and an itchy mattress. I would sleep like the dead unaware of what was feeding on me in the night or what scampered across my body in the small hours. As I looked back to the Ridgeway I could see thin plumes of smoke rising above the woodland as other travellers made small fires and prepared to settle in for a cold, bleak night, full of strange noises and rustlings. I was pleased I could afford to stay in modest comfort. As I approached my night's rest a white shadow quartered across rough ground. Silent, hungry. It hovered and dove to ground and slowly rose, a small body writhing in its talons. I had seen many barn owls where I live, some nesting in the barns I had helped to make while indentured as a young carpenter.

Next morning there was a slight smattering of snow dusting the tops of the trees which deepened as I climbed back up to the Ridgeway. I disturbed a hare which shot out of the undergrowth and sped across an unploughed field. I watched as it hunkered down behind a mound of snow-covered grass, the black tips of its long ears just visible, contrasting against the white background. It was freezing and I pulled my cloak closely about me, covering my nose. If I walked fast I would keep warm until the sun appeared and the temperature increased. The wind was light and we were sheltered by bands of trees. The dawn chorus had finished but I recognised the calls of some birds. Robins and blackbirds searching for berries on holly and hawthorn or turning over dead leaves in the hope of a juicy slug or hidden earthworm. A song thrush hidden in a tall bush sang loud and sweetly whilst a family of goldfinches flew in a tight knot before landing on the tall stems of last summer's teasels.

The track was busy, everyone going about their own business. I passed a cart being pulled by a bag of bones. An ancient mule, emaciated, its head down and its eyes sad and pained. The owner prodded it with a stick and a well-aimed kick. As I looked back the animal fell on its side, pulling the cart and its contents over with it. Dead as a doornail. The cruel owner ranted and cursed, repeatedly kicking the accursed animal. The mule was past caring and out of pain. "What a life" I thought to myself and picked up my pace to get away from the two wretches.

I slowed down for a while and engaged in conversation with two young couples. The women's skirts were wet and muddied making them heavy as they walked. We exchanged talk of the Pestilence and their experience of the disease, the effect on their village and their families, what's left of them. We compared treatments we had had - the bloodletting which left us weak and the use of a pigeon's tail feather to lance our buboes. The endless sweating and vomiting. None of us knew how we survived. Since she had recovered one woman had given birth and she carried the scrawny child in a sling on her back. We all gave thanks for God's mercy. As the track went downhill towards some crossing paths they bade me safe journey and turned off for their homesteads.

There were beggars too on the trackway, congregations of them where paths led up from the small villages and hamlets. Some were old soldiers returned from wars fought long ago. Ragged and bony, peg-legged or missing an arm or an eye. Many wishing they had died on the battlefield instead of dragging out this painful, accursed existence. My heart went out to them but my few groats were accounted for and I walked quickly past them looking straight ahead. Guilt on my conscience.

The Way took me across another ancient camp at a high point with lovely views. It seemed to me these ancient camps are connected by this track which I was told leads all the way to a distant place called Norwich. But I needed to reach Kingston del Isle before dark and the days were short at this time of year so I increased my pace passing many slower travellers.

The route passed a collection of huge stones laid out in a long rectangle. Some of the stones had tumbled and there was a small access into the chamber which appeared to be two stories high. Set back into the recesses there were still some human long bones and skulls. It was a strange place in the middle of nowhere, set along this ancient roadway. It's somewhere I did not want to linger and I pressed on a short way to the Chalk Horse.

I sat on the Horse's eye for a while to rest and eat my victuals. A fat friar on a small pony stopped to join me. I wondered why all friars seemed to be fat and always rode an animal far too small to carry their magnificent weight. Luckily he had his own fine lunch and I noticed he had no intention of sharing his good fortune with the likes of me. As I got up to move on he blessed me whilst chewing an enormous mouthful. The words were garbled but no doubt well intentioned.

The walking was good here and I was intrigued by the views of the undulating folds in the landscape. I turned off at Blowingstone Hill and made my way down into Kingston. As I passed the Blowingstone itself I looked around. No-one was in sight so I blew through the holes as King Alfred was said to have done to summons his troops to the Battle of Ashdown. Unfortunately for me my blow was more of a squeak than a trumpet.

I could hear owls beginning to call to each other and as I approached the lodgings in Kingston del Isle streams of bats poured from an old barn. Instinctively I ducked my head in case they bumped into me as they swirled and screamed past me. Such strange creatures of the night. A hot meal and a place to rest was all I wanted.

My third day on the road and I was nearing the end of my journey. I traced my steps back up Blowingstone Hill and rubbed the Blowingstone for luck as I passed it. The weather was glorious and if I made good progress I might reach my sweetheart's home in the afternoon. There were fewer travellers today to hamper my progress but I walked with three like-minded fellows who wanted to press on as fast as possible. My chilblains were causing me much pain and one of my new friends had tripped in a pothole and had bloodied his knee and nose when he hit the ground. We stumbled on together.

A band of about twenty soldiers, ragged peasants more likely, marched wearily past us. They carried their weapons of war; pike staves and pitch forks. Perhaps they were heading for Weymouth and a free trip to France to join the King in his latest fight. Rather them than me.

Through the clearings alongside the track I could see farmsteads and homesteads in the distance that I recognised and a collection of houses clustered around a small church. Only a few miles until my journey's end and a new beginning with a wife by my side. Again I quickened my pace and in another hour I could see my uncle's farmstead close by the market place. I would rest here for a day before I was married. My sweetheart Blanche was my aunt's niece and although we had been intended for many years this was very much a love match.



Walking down from the Ridgeway into the small town of Wantage I could hear the lowing of the cattle in the byres and the bleating of sheep which had been brought off the hillsides for the winter and Spring lambing. Such comforting sounds.

As I entered my uncle's house I could feel the warmth emanating from the hearth. The family were going about their work preparing their meal but rushed to greet me and pulled me to the fire where a cooking pot hung above the logs . A delicious smell tickled my tastebuds. At last a hot meal, a jug of ale and a chance to wash my mud-caked hose. My intended wife, dabs of flour on her nose and forehead, came running excitedly towards me and kissed my cheeks. We had not seen each other for a year.

On Christmas Day my intended and I, warmly dressed, were in the Parish Church of St Peter and St Paul exchanging our vows. We gave thanks for being spared from the Pestilence and prayed for our departed loved ones. Later at uncle's house there was much merriment and the ale flowed very freely. The next day my new, pretty wife and I walked the mile from her home to our home in Letecombe Regis where, in time, new generations would occupy the house where my family had already lived for three generations.



The head of the Uffington White Horse. Photo: Dave Cavanagh



Photo: Laureen Roberts

# Ridgeway Horse Riders & Carriage Drivers Access Group

## Janice Bridger

**THE FACEBOOK** Ridgeway Horse Riders & Carriage Drivers Access Group was set up when it was realised that those unconnected to the equestrian world had little idea how horse riders and carriage drivers value this ancient road and the rights of way that connect to it. The group, which currently has 884 members, has a number of uses. Apart from riders just recording a day out with their trusty steed, it has been used to survey the views of riders on the desire for a riding route east

of Streatley.

In addition, on the Facebook page under the 'More' tab, and then 'Files', there are a number of circular rides and drives which were recently surveyed by riders and drivers for others to follow. There is also a list of suitable horsebox parking places. If you post your pictures of your ride or drive, they are logged in under the 'More' tab, and then 'Media', 'Photos' for others to see and to encourage them to visit the Ridgeway. So don't hesitate to post!

To look at or join, type 'Ridgeway Horse Riders & Carriage Drivers Access Group' in the Facebook search box

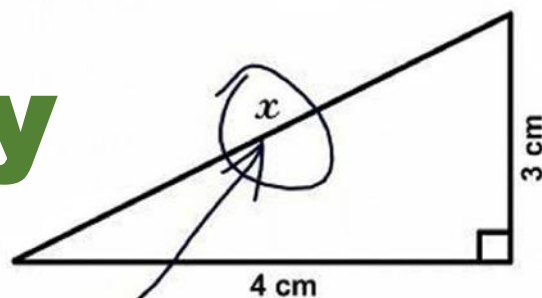


Photos: left, Laureen Roberts; above, Janice Bridger



# Recent archaeology news

3. Find  $x$ .



*Here it is*

Jim Gunter

**AT THE WEST END** of the Ridgeway National Trail at Overton Hill, Wiltshire, lies the small village of East Kennett. People will no doubt be familiar with the Neolithic and Bronze Age monuments that proliferate around this area, with the much visited Avebury henge and stone circles, West Kennet Avenue, Silbury Hill, West Kennet long barrow and numerous Bronze Age round barrows are all within a short walk from the Trail.

Less well known perhaps is the East Kennett long barrow, just over 1km from the formal end of the Trail. This long barrow is even longer than its better known neighbour, but remains obscure as

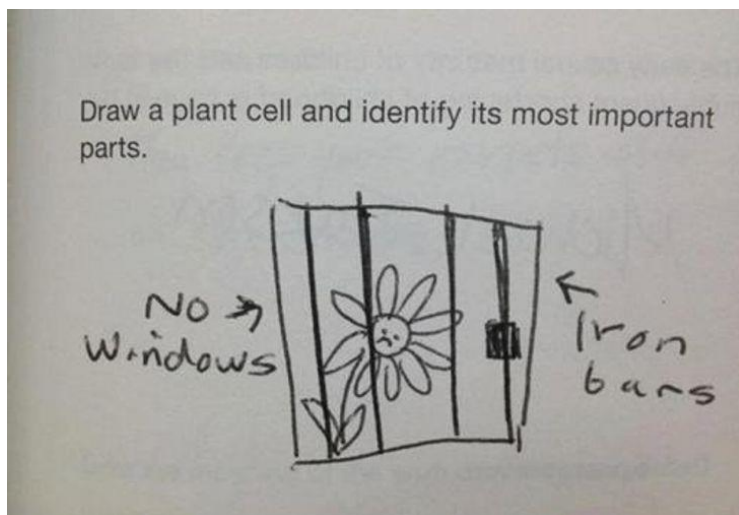
it is not publicly accessible and has not been subjected to any archaeological investigation since the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The area around East Kennett is in fact dotted with many prehistoric, Roman and later sites. Now a new one has been added.

A local farmer spotted a small sink hole in one of his arable fields in the summer of 2020 and at first thought it was just another badger sett. But when he examined it more closely it appeared to be lined with unworked sarsen stones forming some kind of chamber.

Archaeologists from Historic England and Wiltshire Council's

Archaeology Service examined the site and the surrounding area and have confirmed that it is a megalithic square burial chamber, comprising a lower level of four large flat sarsen boulders that meet each other at the edges at roughly right angles. On top of the lower sarsens were two large sarsens, one of which appears to be a long flat stone, like a lintel. The feature is likely to date to the Late Neolithic or Early Bronze Age, around 4,500 years ago.

A survey has given indications that there may be several more in the same field

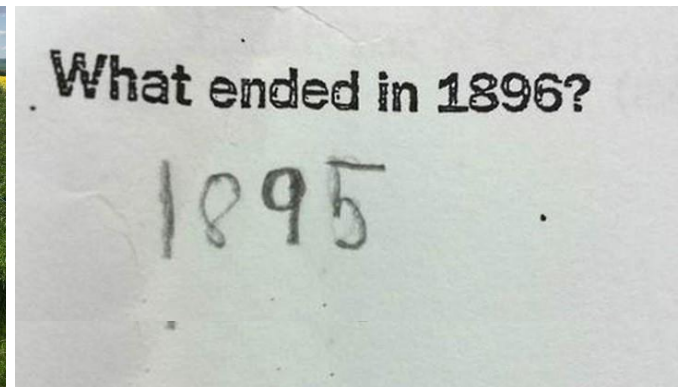




# Trail trial in the World Heritage Site

**THE WESTERN END** of the Ridgeway is within the World Heritage Site that includes Avebury, Stonehenge and many other prehistoric structures. The surface of the Trail, which has unrestricted byway status, has been badly damaged by motor vehicles over time, not only making it difficult for other users but also harming archaeological features. To prevent further damage, Wiltshire Council introduced an Experimental Traffic Regulation Order in May, meaning that use by motor vehicles is forbidden. It is possible that restrictions could be relaxed for motor cycles if they could be shown to cause minimal damage. Whilst the restriction still applies to four-wheeled vehicles, the Trail between Hackpen Hill and Overton Hill in Wiltshire is now open to the public on motorcycles as well as on foot, bicycle, horseback and horse-drawn carriage.

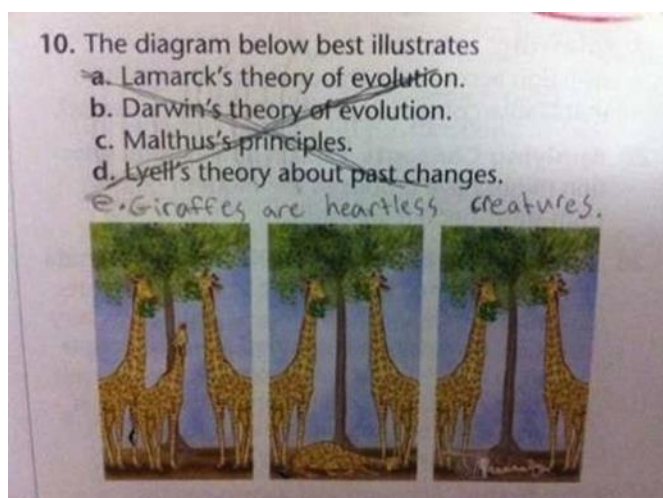
The Council and the Ridgeway Officer are monitoring the impact on the Trail surface. Their findings will advise both preservation of associated archaeology and bringing the surface up to National Trail standards.



# A trail of two halves

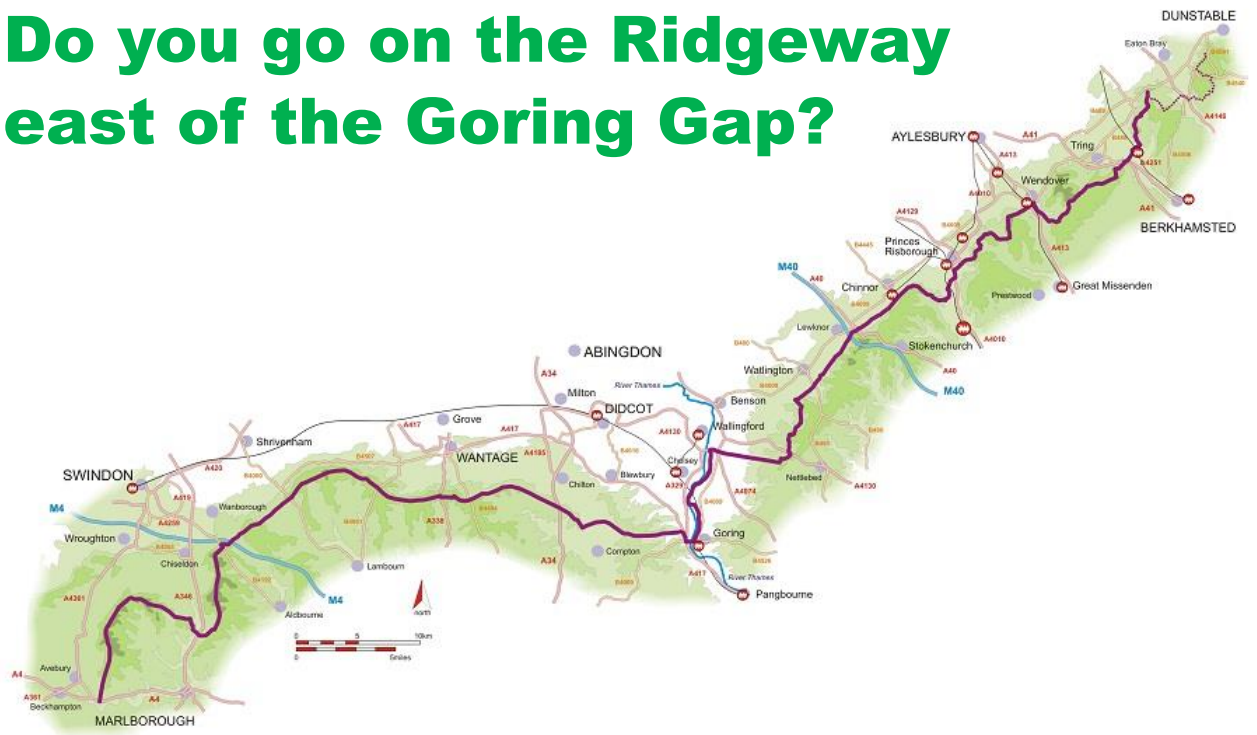
**THOSE FAMILIAR** with the Ridgeway west of the Thames will know that it is commonly used by cyclists and horse riders as well as walkers and runners, and is also open to robust mobility scooters. This is because the Ridgeway in the Wessex region is not only wide with gentle changes of direction, accommodating disparate users safely, but also because it has byway or bridleway status, legally permitting multi-use. Here the Ridgeway is often a mile or more away from the nearest villages. East of the Ridgeway the situation could hardly be more different, as it twists and turns on its way through busier country and, most

importantly, frequently has only footpath status, which does not permit horse riders and cyclists. The Ridgeway Partnership has embarked on an ambitious, long term project to create a Ridgeway riding route for cyclists and horse riders through the Chilterns between Goring and Ivinghoe Beacon. The needs of landowners and local inhabitants need to be considered as well as the needs of users. To this end the Partnership has conducted a survey, with over 1800 responses. Current ideas are being tested by creating a short section of riding route in the Wendover area. You can find out more about this on the Trail's [website](#).





# Do you go on the Ridgeway east of the Goring Gap?



**MOST OF** the trustees of the Friends live in the Wessex section of the Ridgeway, to the west of the Thames. Consequently we do not have as many photos of the northern section of the Trail as we do of the southern part. If you have shots that reveal what the Ridgeway looks like from around the

Thames to the end in Buckinghamshire, please send some to me ([davecavanagh1000@gmail.com](mailto:davecavanagh1000@gmail.com)). Include your name, so that you will be acknowledged, and tell me the location. If you have some fond memories of when you took a photo, share those with us too.





# New chair of Friends of the Ridgeway

## Mike Lewington



TO INTRODUCE MYSELF, I was previously a military officer for over 30 years, a Company Secretary and latterly 12 years as the Chief Executive of Calibre

Audio Library a charity publishing and providing audio books for the visually impaired, finally retiring in 2019.

It is a privilege to be appointed as a Trustee and Chair of the Friends of the Ridgeway. I moved to Oxfordshire in 1993 and live close to the trail. With my family I have thoroughly enjoyed making full use of it both

walking and cycling even in the driving rain and snow!

I want to ensure we can continue working in partnership to protect The Ridgeway for the continued enjoyment for everyone, long into the future. If you have any concerns, please do not hesitate to get in contact with me by email through the website.

I would like to pay tribute to my predecessor as Chair, Anthony Burdall, and I am delighted he has agreed to continue to assist in the organisation of the 2022 Swire Arts Prize. I would also like to add my appreciation for the work done by all the Trustees and Sarah Wright, the Ridgeway Trail Officer.

## Other members of your executive committee

### Tim Lewis (Treasurer, Membership Sec.)

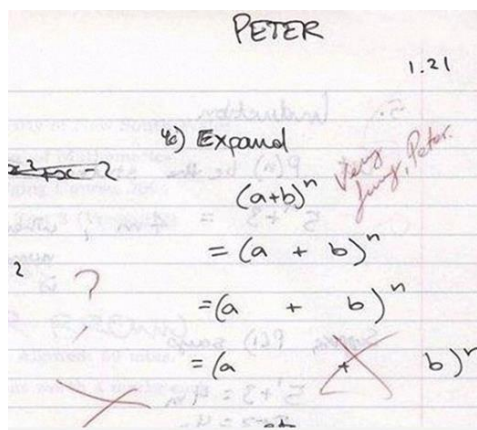
THE RIDGEWAY was the first long-distance trail I walked, since when I have walked many more, including all but two of the National Trails. Helping to conserve it as a wonderful natural asset open to all and fits well with my role within the Ramblers and the Wiltshire and Swindon Countryside Access Forum.



### Dave Cavanagh (Secretary)



WALKING IS at the heart of much that I do, whether it be solo, with my wife, local friends or with Ramblers, for whom I lead walks. I am also occupied making walking as attractive to people as possible by improving access to the countryside, including path maintenance with the Ramblers Vale of White Horse volunteers, reporting footpath issues to the county council, and as a member of Oxfordshire Countryside Access Forum.



Continued ...



## Nathan Boyd

I'VE SPENT a large portion of my life working around the Ridgeway and love nothing more than an early morning walk up above

White Horse Hill at Uffington or near my office at Watlington, but know the route well enough from Blewbury Downs though to Avebury with plenty of fond memories. Having been elected a District Councillor and having the Uffington stretch in my ward I've heard from residents their fondness of the route, which has made me want to ensure that it is preserved for future generations to use, while ensuring it is open to everyone who wants to experience the historic route safely.

## Jane Imbush

AS A KEEN equestrian, I feel immensely privileged to have access to the Ridgeway as a safe place to ride and enjoy



the varied landscapes, nature, epic views and historic routes. My knowledge of the Ridgeway centres on the Berkshire/Oxfordshire stretch but I am very keen to explore further afield. Promoting and protecting our ancient byways for vulnerable users is a key part of why I became a Friend of the Ridgeway.

## Duncan Strutt



I'VE HIKED, climbed and cycled in many parts of the world for nearly 50 years and the Ridgeway connects me with a route closer to home. Its varied terrain, often unexpected remoteness, (especially in a near blizzard at Barbury Castle) and its history reminds me that sometimes we forget to look more deeply at areas nearby. As a society we may be more 'e-connected' but perhaps at the expense of our connection with the natural world. We must continue to manage and maintain our open spaces for future generations, the Friends are determined to work to this goal and I'm delighted to be a trustee.

## Jim Gunter



FOR THE LAST 25 years I have been living in the shadow of The Ridgeway in Wiltshire. I'm a keen walker and first walked most of the Ridgeway in a very wet July in 1992 – an experience that only made its many attractions even more pronounced. I have a BA and MA in archaeology, in which I focussed on my work in uncovering the site of a long lost stone circle near Avebury. As I work as a commercial archaeologist across the south west but mostly in the Stonehenge and Avebury World Heritage Site, I joined the Friends as a Trustee back in 2008 when the group was seeking archaeological input.

## Ed Peveller

I AM A professional archaeologist working for Berkshire Archaeology providing advice to local planning



authorities (in the "eastern half" of Berkshire). I have a doctorate in archaeology, having written a thesis on the production and use of building materials in Roman Oxfordshire, and I have previously worked on the archaeology of the Chilterns AONB. I'm a keen walker and runner, and have spent many days up on the Ridgeway, along its full length, enjoying the landscape, its archaeology, wildlife, and the brilliant views.