



Friends of the Ridgeway

Spring 2022



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www.ridgewayfriends.org.uk



@FriendsOfTheRidgeway

Welcome

Editor Dave Cavanagh

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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

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

Cover photo by Jane Imbush on Paddy, on a 'Byway Open to All Traffic' section of the Ridgeway in West Berkshire

SWIRE RIDGEWAY ARTS PRIZE 2022

The winners of the Swire Ridgeway Arts Prize received their awards at the end of the two-day Exhibition (2nd and 3rd April) in Uffington village hall. There was a wonderful array of art on display, reflecting the many ways in which the Ridgeway and its environs inspire all who go there. The overall winner was Christine Bass for her painting (wall art category) 'Ivinghoe Beacon from Steps Hill.'



Christin Bass (R) with event organiser Anthony Burdall (L) and chair of judges Lucy Stopford.

Cally Shadbolt won the sculpture category for 'Red Kite'. The writing category was won by Carole Barfoot for 'Monument', and Jim Ritchie took the prize for his photograph 'Dragon Hill.'

The artworks were really evocative of the Ridgeway and its extensions to the Dorset and Norfolk coasts (the Great Chalk Way). All the artworks are on the Friends of the Ridgeway website <https://ridgewayfriends.org.uk/swire-ridgeway-arts-prize-2022/> where they will be available for viewing for several months.

In 2017, following a generous donation from Sir Adrian Swire, the Friends of the Ridgeway created the Swire Ridgeway Arts Prize, an event held annually since then.



Ivinghoe Beacon from Steps Hill by Christine Bass, overall winner of the Swire Ridgeway Arts Prize 2022

PHOTOS FROM THIS YEAR'S SWIRE RIDGEWAY ARTS PRIZE.

The judges (immediately below) of each of the four categories (photography, sculpture, wall art, written) made their initial assessments by viewing the artworks online. They then came together on the Friday evening to talk things over and make their decisions. 'Famished Flamingo Café' provided refreshments throughout.



40TH ANNIVERSARY

Since the formation of Friends of the Ridgeway in 1982 patience, fortitude, perseverance, sheer hard graft and not a little lobbying have been watchwords of the association. Former chair Ian Ritchie recapped this ahead of our AGM on 3rd April, as related later in this newsletter. We also issued a press release to remind everyone of our successes with regard to getting recreational vehicles prohibited from parts of the Ridgeway – and to point out that the job was not yet complete. We have responded to the Government's questionnaire on the Glover Landscape Review, urging that the Ridgeway and all National Trails should be brought up to the standards stipulated by Natural England.

WHO WROTE THIS?

I've started walking. Not the everyday kind that I began to master as a toddler. I mean proper Walking. Weatherproof boots. Sturdy jacket. Maps. Compass. Countryside. I'm not terribly fast or anything and don't scale any great heights. It's not as if they'll be asking me to present *Countryfile*. Not at my age. But for the past three or four years I've been tramping along public footpaths in remote parts of

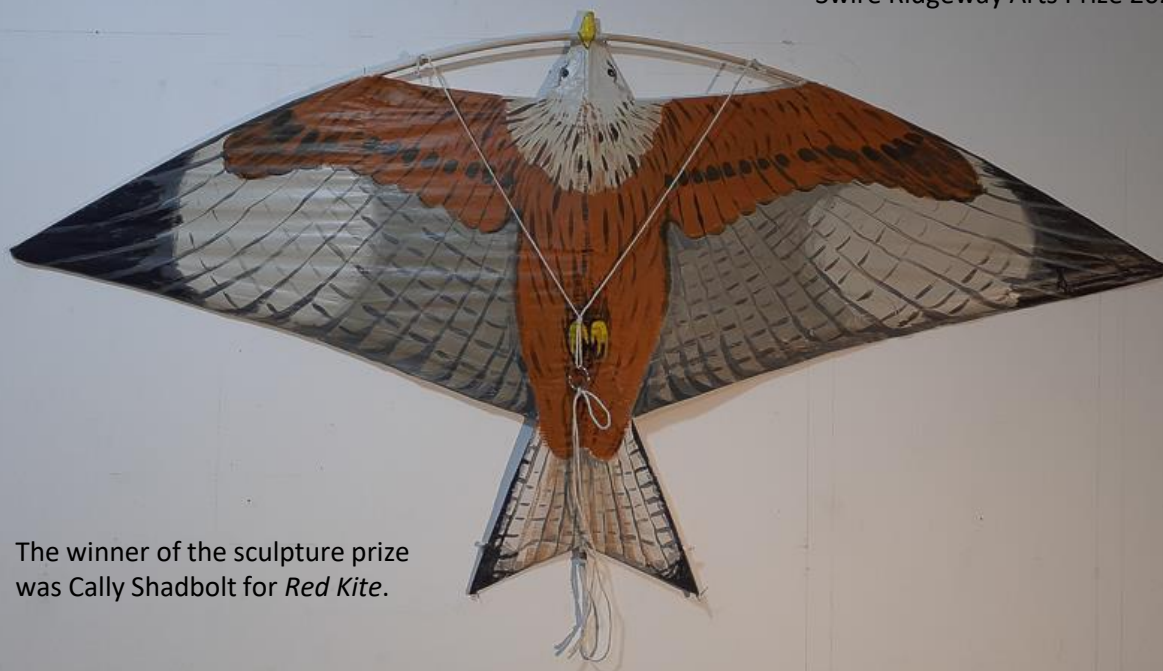
predecessor had stipulated at their inception, which included that they should be traffic-free.



the kingdom which previously I'd have whizzed by in the car or train. And I've learned that one of the great unwritten rules of Walking is that you should greet Walkers coming from the opposite direction. I've lost count of the number of times that ruddy-faced, big-booted people have cheerily wished me 'Good morning', 'Lovely day' or 'Get out of the way, fatso, you're spoiling the view for everyone'.

Answer: Eddie Mair, in his book *A Good Face for Radio, Confessions of a Radio Head* (2017), page 26, published by Little, Brown.

Swire Ridgeway Arts Prize 2022



The winner of the sculpture prize was Cally Shadbolt for *Red Kite*.

These photos were taken by members of FoR around 1999. This montage dates from then. They illustrate vividly why we continue to campaign to have recreational vehicles banned from the Ridgeway National Trail. The 'For' numbers are arbitrary numbers assigned to each photo in the collection at the time.



Motor cyclists making muddy tracks on the soft surface. Near Compton. (For6)



Underage motor cyclist, aged about 8 (For7) his father had driven there by car



(For8) intersection of B4000 & R'gway



(For9) Abandoned car, probably stolen and mud near the FairMile, Compton

Photos ~1999



(For10) Poor walker having problems with track surface near Wayland's Smithy

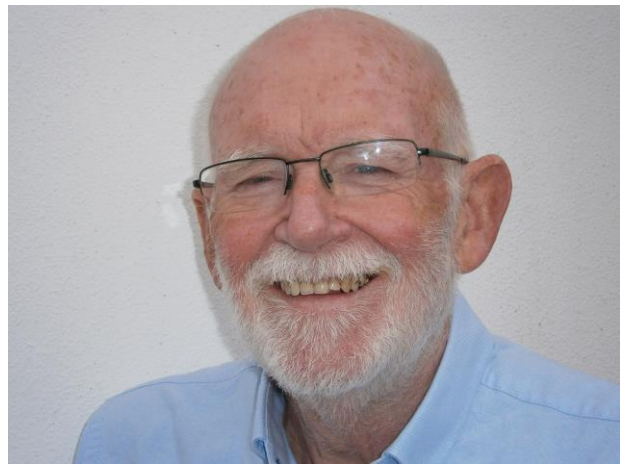


(For11) 'Friends' inspecting Wilts Coun Council attempts to improve the green road with a white surface, near Avebury



Ian Ritchie

– looking back



Ian Ritchie became Chair of FoR in 2001, resigning in 2015 to become the first Chair of the Ridgeway Partnership, the organisation that manages the Ridgeway National Trail. In this, the 40th year of FoR, Ian looks back at how he became involved with FoR and how he steered it to its first successes. Below are extracts from his address ahead of the AGM on 3rd April, taking us through the second decade of FoR.

I retired in 2000 and took up a number of charity jobs, as did my partner Susan. One day we were out walking on the Ridgeway on a particularly damaged section, with deep ruts and pools of mud and water caused by 4x4 off-road vehicles. My language got worse and worse until Susan turned on me and said “If it upsets you so much, why not do something about it?”

Then happened an amazing coincidence. I was registered with an organisation – REACH - that helps retired people find jobs in the charitable sector and they sent me details of an organisation called Friends of the Ridgeway who were looking for a chairman. When I saw what the organisation stood for, I applied and got the job – perhaps not surprising as I think I was the only applicant! I took up the job in 2001.

I have no clear recall of the size of the membership then but guess it would be not

much more than 100. A figure that does stick in my mind, however, was the bank balance of £239! I leave you to contrast that to the figure in the latest accounts! [£62,000].

Around the table for our committee meetings were some stalwarts of those early days – Kate Crennell, Anna Hanslip, John Templeton and the secretary, Peter Gould. Peter did a remarkable amount of work helping keep the organisation going and in many ways was a remarkable man. His accent was broad Bristolian, his interests ranged far and wide, he travelled everywhere on public transport and somehow or other he managed to produce our Newsletters more or less on time and always with a fascinating range of articles, most of which he wrote. Where else would you find newsletters that included references to Bellerophon, the old railways of Bristol and a species of snail found mainly on the Ridgeway?

Continued ...

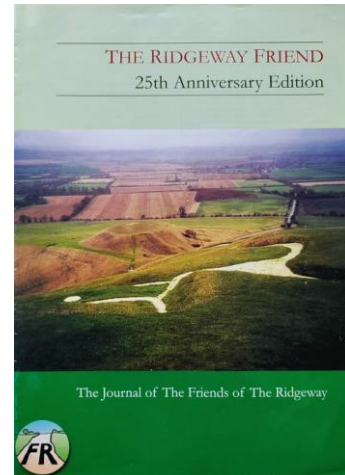
We have our own leaflet describing Friends of the Ridgeway. You can download this from the [homepage](#) of the FoR website and from the Ridgeway National Trail [leaflets page](#)

One of my first actions was to try to find a suitable president for The Friends. I approached Chris Bonington, whom I knew, and asked him. He declined as he felt living in The Lakes he was too remote from TR, but agreed to be our Patron. He went on to make a great suggestion – that we approach Chris Brasher, who lived much closer and who had a background in journalism as well as his well-known outdoor interests. Chris proved to be an inspired choice – he worked hard for us, got us lots of press, radio and TV coverage as well as being a good guy. Another good move was to invite all the MPs along the route to become Vice Presidents – all agreed bar one!

Membership numbers began to rise, as did our funds and we started to be noticed. We established productive working relationships with the local Highway Authorities along the trail and with the National Trails Office, where Jos Joslin became a good friend of ours.

The battle for The Ridgeway

Some of you may remember this – our 25th Anniversary brochure. It was the brainchild of another of the great people I have worked with – Jeff Goddard. He introduced it, edited it and produced it. I think I am right in saying that, like me, Jeff came to us via REACH. He proved to be a steadfast support to me as we swung into action against the off-road-ers.



Ian then highlighted key events in the early noughties, quoting from the brochure.

- The early withdrawal of our support for the voluntary and totally ineffective Ridgeway Code of Conduct. Our withdrawal got wide media coverage and garnered more supporters to our cause
- The achievement of a permanent Traffic Regulation Order (TRO) on the Smeeth's Ridge section of the trail in Wiltshire [which banned all recreational vehicles]. This was the first mention by a Highway Authority that action was needed to protect the surface of the trail and gave notice of what was to follow. This TRO was introduced in 2003
- The introduction from winter 2004 of seasonal TROs on long sections of the route in Wiltshire, West Berkshire and Oxfordshire. With help from the National Trails team we were able to persuade those authorities to place a ban for seven months each year [1st October to 30th April] on the use of the trail by motor vehicles

At this point in his talk Ian said "Some of what follows might sound vain, but I think the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006 was my finest hour as your Chairman." To find out why such a prosaic title excited Ian so much, be sure to read about FoR's third decade in the autumn issue.

Seeking peace and quiet

LOOKING BACK at our press cuttings in the previous issue of this newsletter we stopped in mid-1992. At that time the Ridgeway – technically a road used as a public path (RUPP) – was open to all motorised traffic, all year round. The Countryside Commission had again called for the closing of the Trail to such traffic on Sundays and Bank Holidays. The response from county councils was negative, in part because it was felt that it would be impossible to enforce such a ban. Others, including some in FoR at the time, saw it as a step forward. There was a public enquiry in October 1992.

THE FRIENDS OF THE RIDGEWAY

The good news for 1992 is that after years of campaigning, by those who see the Ridgeway as a place for quiet recreation, the Department of Transport has published its draft Traffic Regulation Order. This would prohibit the use of recreational vehicles on the Ridgeway on Sundays and Bank Holidays. Objections to the draft must now be considered. The County Councils of both Oxon. and Wilts. have declared themselves against the Order on the grounds that they cannot enforce it. The environmental services committee of my own district council, the Vale of the White Horse, has backed the plan.

Since I wrote last, a good stretch of the track has been restored, so that instead of progressing "cycs down" in order to wade through mud, or scramble in and out of ruts, one can step out freely, and gaze one's fill at the horizon. Of course, the better the track the more some people want to drive on it

SUBSEQUENTLY, after more than a year of deliberation, the Department of Transport decided against the move. Back to square 1.

RIDGEWAY IS KEPT OPEN TO VEHICLES

Campaign for ban fails

By JENNY BARR
ADVERTISER STAFF

MOTORCYCLISTS have been given free rein to ride along Britain's oldest road.

Nature-lovers had been pressing for tough action against traffic shattering the peace on a 40-mile stretch of the Ridgeway which runs through Wiltshire.

The Countryside Commission wanted vehicles to be banned from using the trail on Sundays and Bank Holidays, but the proposal sparked more than 600 objections.

signposted footpaths. It is a very sad decision."

The Countryside Commission claimed the Ridgeway was being churned up and walkers' peace shattered.

But counter-protesters said a ban would

Bikers just want a bit of fun, like the walkers

be unnecessary, unfair, costly and ineffec-

THE TIMES FRIDAY APRIL 9 1993

Off-road motorists face legal ban on ancient byways

By TIM JONES
AND JOHN YOUNG

THE government is considering new powers to prevent Britain's ancient ridgeways and byways from being churned up and destroyed by four-wheel-drive vehicles.

The growing popularity of off-road motoring has pitched its proponents into conflict with landowners, farmers, riders, conservation groups and rambles. There is nothing to prevent vehicles from driving on historic routes such as the Ridge Way in Wiltshire and Berkshire.

Tracks have been badly rutted and there have been frequent complaints of noise and disturbance to wildlife. Lord Denning, the former Master of the Rolls, was told last week that he had lost a five-year battle to stop vehicles from using a track across land he owns in Hampshire.

A working party established by the government to try to resolve the conflict has failed to agree a compromise. Its report, *The Future of Byways*, is now being considered by Michael Howard, the environment secretary. It says that byways must not be treated as just another highway but should be recognised as a prime recreational asset and given proper regulation, management and repair.

The law does not distinguish between the A1 and a green lane or stony mountain track. Unsurfaced tracks used by vehicles have been shown on maps as "roads used as public paths". More recent

■ The popularity of all-terrain vehicles has raised the question of whether centuries-old rights of way are still appropriate

legislation has seen them reclassified as "byways open to all traffic".

Hampshire County Council, which has been reclassifying more than 500 paths, has discovered that many were ancient carriageways and legally had to be open to all traffic. It has had to respond to fierce opposition from people who fear that the tracks will become highways.

One proposal in the working party report is for four-wheel-drive clubs to issue licence plates to members, allowing them to use a byway at certain times. The idea has been strongly resisted by the Ramblers' Association, which believes Britain's 5,000 miles of byways should be closed to vehicles.

Janet Davis, the association's senior rights-of-way officer, said yesterday that it was no longer appropriate for byways to be open to all classes of vehicle. Walkers and riders should be able to find byways free of motor vehicles. It had no objections to bicycles or horse-drawn vehicles.

Last autumn, a public enquiry was held into a proposed traffic regulation order to ban motor vehicles from the Ridge Way on Sundays and bank holidays. The proposal was supported by the Countryside Commission and the Council for the Protection of Rural

England (CPRE), but opposed by motorcyclists. A decision is still awaited.

William Sheate, the CPRE's transport campaigner, said that the council had recently published a briefing paper on byways. It was an issue that frequently taxed its members. "Getting changes made in the law can be very difficult, because some rights of way are ancient," he said.

"You can't just extinguish something that has been in existence for centuries because circumstances have changed, which is why our policy generally is to press for traffic regulation orders. We would welcome any measures that the government might take to prevent damaged and disruption by motor vehicles."

Leading article, page 15

on next page.

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Oxford Times 10 Dec 93

DoT rules out Ridgeway vehicle ban

Countryside campaigners have failed in their bid to get motorbikes and cars banned from the ancient Ridgeway trail on 60 days a year.

After more than a year's deliberations, the Department of Transport announced this week that vehicles will be allowed on the historic track on Sundays and Bank Holidays.

The news comes as a blow to groups who, at a public inquiry in October last year, argued the case for restrictions.

They said families enjoying a stroll in the beautiful Ridgeway countryside were put at risk by motorbikes and cars vying for space on the track. They argued that vehicles were churning up the track, which passes through south Oxfordshire and is Britain's oldest road.

Miss Joan Pye, of the Friends of the Ridgeway group, said: "We are extremely disappointed but will continue to work for the safe and quiet recreational opportunities of this beautiful

piece of countryside. "Having families and vehicles using the same track is extremely dangerous. In some places it is only 8ft wide. It causes distress to people when they have to share it with cars."

The 40-mile stretch of the trail from Overton Hill in Wiltshire to Stratley in Berkshire has been open to vehicles since prehistoric times.

In an announcement on Monday, the Roads and Traffic Minister, Mr Robert Key,

said the access rights could not be restricted "without good reason".

Motoring groups, who fought the proposed ban, say they will continue talks with countryside groups over shared access.

Mr Alan Kind, of the Land Access and Recreation Association, said: "This is a satisfactory result, because it shows that recreational motorcyclists are not cowboys and hooligans. We take this issue very seriously as legitimate countryside users."

U-turn over Ridgeway trail ban

FROM THE MID-1990s the topic of motor vehicles on the RW and other green lanes was discussed in both the House of Commons and the House of Lords. In the early 2000s Ian Ritchie, the then Chair of FoR, spent a lot of time lobbying in the Commons. In 2002 the MP for Wantage, Robert Jackson, made a major contribution in the Commons, specifically on the RW. Lord (Bill) William Peter Bradshaw, FoR's then new (and current) President, was very active in the Lords. His predecessor, Chris Brasher, also did much valuable work in promoting our cause.

FOR ALSO ENGAGED with county councils seeking, at the very least, closure of the RW to recreational motor vehicles in the months when the ground is soft and most easily turned into a quagmire.



Ridgeway

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Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—[Mrs. McGuire.]

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Mr. Robert Jackson (Wantage): In my maiden speech in this Chamber in 1983, I waxed lyrical about the primeval monuments that distinguish my constituency, including the white horse, dating back to 1,000 years before Christ, and the bronze-age barrows dating back 2,000 years before that. I am afraid that I omitted to mention the even older feature that links all those monuments together: the Ridgeway. Tonight, I hope to make up for that omission.

ution

The Ridgeway, stretching along 85 miles from Overton Hill in Wiltshire to Ivinghoe Beacon in Buckinghamshire, is England's oldest green road. It dates back to the earliest days of agriculture and inter-regional trade in this country, 6,000 years ago. It is an historical feature of European importance, and because of its upland location it is, or rather it ought to be, a site of great natural beauty.

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I say ought to be, because the Ridgeway is being subjected to such abuse and progressive degradation that, although the distant views from it may be splendid, those who walk it or ride along it are dismayed at every turn. The present unhappy state of the Ridgeway, to which I am drawing the House's attention, has come about as a result of a combination of many different factors, the most fundamental of which is the growth in the number and variety of motor vehicles. That has exposed this ancient highway to a host of new pressures. Alongside that is a failure of public regulation, which has not kept up with this automotive explosion, and has not mitigated and managed its impact.

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I shall begin with the growth of motor traffic on the Ridgeway. I particularly want the Minister to realise that it is certain that growing affluence and the multiplication of automotive technologies will go on throwing up new ways of abusing the Ridgeway, and of expanding and intensifying the scale of the pressures that we have already experienced. For instance, over the past decade there has been a 400 per cent. increase nationally in the number of off-road motor bikes and 4x4 motor cars, which has brought with it a corresponding increase in the use of the Ridgeway by such vehicles.

The consequences of that problem immediately hit the eye when one walks the Ridgeway at any time of the year, as my wife and I do frequently. Those vehicles destroy the surface of the trail. In wet weather, huge sections of it become a sea of mud and deep puddles. In dry weather, the surface sets into a series of ankle-twisting, knee-wrenching ruts. The impact is not only visual: there is also the noise, especially the buzzing from the motorbikes, and the pollution that those vehicles cause. This is a matter of great concern in my constituency and in those of my colleagues who are present for this debate.

Those are not the only abuses that arise from the openness of the Ridgeway to motor traffic. Because of its easy accessibility, the Ridgeway is the scene of all-night raves, with large numbers of vehicles driving along it to party sites. It is used by so-called travellers, who set up their camps and leave behind them piles of rubbish when they are moved along by the authorities. There is also more and more fly tipping: it is easy to drive a short way

New sign for old

MEMBERS OF THE RIDGEWAY and Thames Path Volunteers removed an old Ridgeway fingerpost at Watlington Hill in February. The replacement has the new-style finger board designs. Lucy Duerdoth, who manages the volunteers, said “We had hoped we’d be

able to move the post but there were just so many utilities underground in the end the only spot left was the one where the old post was. But we cut back the scrub behind/around the post so it’s much more visible now from all approaches.”



Martin Beecher, Roger Pope and Steve Graham of the Ridgeway and Thames Path Volunteers. Photo Lucy Duerdoth.

Cheryl Fury
@TudorWench



3:47 pm - 7 Jan 2022 - Twitter for iPhone

1,003 Retweets 115 Quote Tweets 8,205 Likes



When a RUPP is a BOAT

THREE related items in the NWN February 9 require comment:

Amongst the public notices is one regarding the re-classification of a Road Used as a Public Path (RUPP) as a By-way Open to All Traffic (BOAT).

Richard Nicholson, writing on the letters page, refers to the same in a plea for information regarding RUPP 14 - Litchfield and Woodcutt. This is a section of the Wayfarers Walk. Under the re-classification order this track will be opened up to all vehicular traffic, endangering ramblers, cyclists, and horse riders; not to mention having an adverse effect on the natural environment in general.

Of particular note is Hampshire County Council's attitude towards re-classification. This is set out in an interesting leaflet, 'Review of the Definitive Map of Public Rights of Way or when is a RUPP not a RUPP - when it's a BOAT.'

This essential piece of bedside reading sets out the legal case for re-classification and what legal arguments are allowable against the orders. The ONLY argument allowable is that of 'historic use'. Environmental considerations are ignored; suitability of the track surface is ignored, danger to other users is ignored.

HCC's policy is 'Once a highway - always a highway'. A cynic's interpretation of this is that, if it can be shown that Neanderthal man rolled a wooden wheeled cart down the track in the year dot, Neanderthal man will be allowed to roll a Range Rover down it tomorrow.

Berkshire's experience of 4 x 4 motorists is clear from your report in the same issue, 'Softly, softly approach fails to deliver by-ways' improvement'. The majority of these tracks were not designed for heavy motorised vehicles; the use of such vehicles is extremely damaging and 4 x 4 motorists have shown that they are incapable of exercising restraint in their use.

I wish Richard Nicholson all the best with his fight, but fighting each re-classification order one by one is a frustrating process when the route cause is section 54 of the 1981 Wildlife and Countryside Act. This ill-conceived piece of legislation paved the way for the re-classification of ALL RUPPs as BOATs.

KEITH W. TOMEY
Hartley Gardens
Tadley

THIS LETTER in the *Newbury Weekly News* (February 1995) may seem to be not for the faint-hearted, with the frequent mention of 'RUPPS' and 'BOATS' (the latter having nothing to do with floaty things). However, as we shall see in the next issue of the For newsletter, the RUPP status of the Ridgeway, combined with perhaps tactical tardiness by Oxfordshire County Council, was later to save the Ridgeway in Oxfordshire from the blight of recreational vehicles.

Newbury Weekly News

16 Feb 1995

Ramblers up the pace to save rural tracks and paths

RAMBLERS in West Berkshire are preparing to fight a proposal that would allow four-wheel drive vehicles onto 3,000 miles of footpaths.

The plan, put forward in a paper called 'Rights of Way in the 21st century' by the Government's rural adviser, the Countryside Commission, is to turn all the country's tracks classified as roads used as public paths into byways.

The idea has shocked ramblers and a local conservation group who say it would allow the growing number of off-road drivers free rein to use the byways and ruin the tranquillity of the countryside, endangering walkers, cyclists and horse riders.

Former Berkshire county councillor for Bradfield Mrs Elizabeth Still set up the lobby group Green Lanes Environmental Action Movement (GLEAM) three years ago to protect such tracks.

She said the Government should make all the tracks footpaths or bridleways and then allow off-roaders onto them if they are thought suitable, not the other way round.

The cost of repairing the damage to the roads to the then Berkshire County Council, she said, was up to £80,000 a year. This burden has now been passed on to unitary authorities like West Berkshire Council.

At present, each of the paths in West Berkshire is being examined on an individual basis by the council, based on whether it has ever been used by wheeled traffic going back as far as the eighteenth century.

However, if the Countryside Commission's proposal was to be adopted, all the paths would be classified as byways, allowing any vehicle to use them.

It would then be up to local authorities to ban vehicles on a specific path by using traffic regulation orders.

Commission spokesman, Mrs Pam Gilder, said this would free up vast amounts of time and money, which could be used to maintain and manage the routes.

"That would be like shutting the stable door after the horse has bolted," said chairman of Newbury Ramblers' Association Mrs Jane Kiely, adding that by the time the orders were in place, the paths could be destroyed.

Newbury's MP, Mr David Rendel, has lent his weight against the proposals and set down an early day motion in the House of Commons to prevent motorised vehicles using byways that were never designed for them.

He said "There is a huge difference between the effect of a horse-drawn cart and a four-wheel drive modern petrol engine vehicle."

This article in the *Newbury Weekly News*, October 1998, is about the Countryside Commission's proposal to, in one fell swoop, turn all the country's RUPPS (roads used as public paths) into BOATS (byways open to all traffic). In the event it fell to each Highway Authority to decide the fate of RUPPS in their area. In Wiltshire the Ridgeway was converted to a BOAT, likewise in parts of Berkshire. As mentioned on the previous page, this did not happen to the Ridgeway in Oxfordshire.

GLEAM

The fourth paragraph introduces us to GLEAM – Green Lanes Environmental Action Movement. This was started in 1995. Its purpose, as it appears on its website <http://www.gleam-uk.org/> is 'The pressure group, founded in 1995, which campaigns for changes in the law to stop thoughtless off-road drivers damaging or destroying green lanes, and the rights of walkers, riders, pedal cyclists, carriage drivers and the disabled to use them without danger, difficulty and inconvenience.'

So, you can see how our aims and those of GLEAM gel very well. Our chair from 2001, Ian Ritchie, worked closely with GLEAM in the early noughties, leading to one of our great successes.

We'll look at GLEAM in more detail in a later issue.



Hmm.

MODERN WORK PRACTICES. A pilot talks through the intercom as his aircraft reaches cruising altitude: "This is your pilot speaking, and I'm working from home today."

Two hydrogen atoms walk into a bar.

1st. I think I've lost an electron.

2nd. Are you sure?

1st. Yes, I'm absolutely positive.

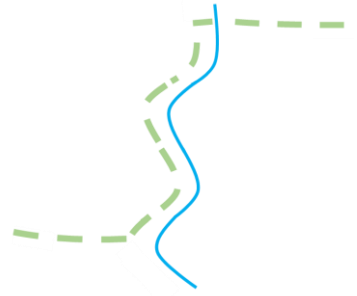
TOMMY COOPER JOKES

I recently decided to sell my vacuum cleaner. All it was doing was gathering dust.

So I said to the taxi driver, 'King Arthur's Close'. He said, 'Don't worry, we'll lose him at the next set of lights.'

I stayed up all night and tried to figure out where the sun was. Then it dawned on me.

Police are hunting the 'knitting needle nutter' who has stabbed 6 people. They believe he could be following some kind of pattern.



Mind the Gap



Orchard Pig
@Orchardpig

Yoda is selling houses in Taunton.



APPARENTLY REAL ANSWERS* to questions put to contestants in various British quiz shows.

*From Private Eye Annual 2018, edited by Ian Hislop, p60.

Q. Born in Trier in Germany in 1818, what was the first name of the political philosopher Marx?

Contestant: Umm, Howard?

Q. On what date is Christmas Day celebrated each year?

Contestant: Wednesday.

Q. In which film did Charlton Heston play Moses?

Contestant: Laurence of Arabia.

Q. What do the initials MI stand for in MI5 and MI6?

Contestant: Mission Impossible.



A man and his Horse

David Miles, archaeologist, guru of the Uffington White Horse and its surroundings, and Yorkshireman (not necessarily in order of importance), came back to Uffington in February to talk about 'Caring for the White Horse. 3000 years of a British icon.'

He is the author of 'The Land of the White Horse, Visions of England'*. This is a very readable account of the Uffington White Horse and archaeological investigations of it. But it is much more than that; it puts the White Horse into historical context with respect to the rise of the importance of horses to people, starting thousands of years ago, and their significance in evolving societies. David also explains why it is that the Uffington White Horse is so stylised, including having a beak. Some British coins from the Iron Age are illustrated with just such fanciful horses.

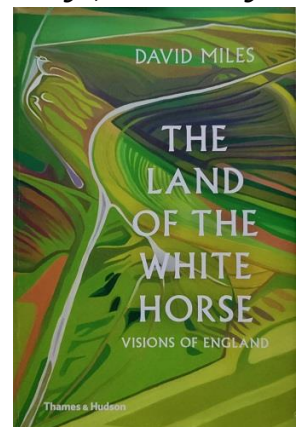
In his talk David related that Daniel Defoe wrote in the 1720s that the Horse consisted of "a trench ... cut into the shape of a horse ... The trench is about two yards wide on the top, about a yard deep, and filled almost up with chalk..." Most other sources suggested that the Uffington horse had been created simply by removing the overlying turf as, I believe, is the case for modern chalk horses. Defoe was spot-on, as research by David and his team would later confirm, over 250 years later.

It was in 1989 that David led a team from the Oxford Archaeological Unit to undertake the most detailed investigation of the Horse and the surrounding hillside.** They not only confirmed what Defoe had said but also demonstrated that the Horse was a thousand years or more older than had commonly been believed.

Dave Cavanagh, another Tyke

*The Land of the White Horse, Visions of England by David Miles (2019). Published by Thames & Hudson.

**For a very detailed account of the investigation and its outcomes read *Uffington White Horse and its landscape: investigations at White Horse Hill, Uffington, 1989-95, and Tower Hill, Ashbury, 1993-4* published in 2003. ISBN 9780947816773. Wantage Library has a copy, Dewey Number 942.57.





Jim Ritchie was the winner of the photography category of the Swire Ridgeway Arts Prize for his photo *Dragon Hill*.

IN FEBRUARY LUCY DUERDOTH, National Trails Project Volunteer Coordinator, was out with volunteers Trevor Scott and Martin Beecher on the Ridgeway in the Chilterns. “We were at Wigans Lane,” said Lucy, “taking out an old narrow metal kissing gate and replacing it with a new wooden one. We would normally have installed a metal gate

(larger than the old one) but the landowner specifically requested a wooden one.” One of the volunteers, Mark Robbins, was unable to make it. “He was travelling by train and there was a tree down on the line from Storm Dudley.” Some of the volunteers travel long distances to get to the task sites.



I had a crazy dream last night. I was swimming in an ocean of orange soda. Turns out it was just a Fanta sea.

Monument

Carole Barfoot

THE OAK PLATFORMS are silhouetted black against the ridge skyline as the red dawn breaks behind the hill. They are visible from below and from miles around. Their construction is solid, four oak uprights one at each corner, rising to a height of five feet and braced to combat the winter gales. The four corners joined by stretchers to keep them taut forming a rectangle six feet by three feet. The high platform made from horizontal timbers is lashed to the frame with old man's beard vines and animal sinews and crossed with woven willow withies. Ten of these structures form a line.

BUZZARDS, ravens and crows circle high on warming thermals. The ravens and crows mob the buzzards who glide effortlessly higher ignoring the false threats from the corvids.

A SMALL PARTY of young men carry a litter on their shoulders to the High Path, to the platforms. The Elders, women and the throng of the community follow. On the litter is the naked body of an elderly man, his grey hair and long beard combed and plaited. He lies on a ceremonial cloak made from deer hides, beaver pelts and ravens feathers. A stag antler and head mask covers his face to denote his position as Shaman. This is my father. He has lived for forty-six summers inheriting his title of Chief and Shaman from his father and those before. My eldest son carries a bow and arrows held in a hide quiver, the arrowheads of finely knapped flint made by the dead man. My second son carries polished stone axes, testament to the craft of the dead one, which glisten in the warming sunshine. The only other adornment of the body is a necklace made from small white quartz stones drilled using hard antler, threaded onto a fine sinew and tied in a complex knot behind his neck.

THE WOMEN KEEN and the children skip as they climb the hill from our camp houses at the base. When they reach the line of platforms the men lift the litter above their heads and slide it onto the platform, securing it with clematis vines. This is almost the final journey for the grandfather, father, husband, brother and Chief of our extended tribe. On the hillside a lone wolf howls as if saying farewell to an old friend. The children reply with mimicking howls and the wolf turns his head and lopes off into the distance. He will be back- he is a constant on the High Path with one eye on our early lambs and young goats for his supper. He, like me, has a family to feed, but we will only tolerate so much from him before a hunting party removes him from his trail and a fine new wolfskin will warm my bed and his skull will join that of the aurochs bull on posts outside my home.

OF THE TEN PLATFORMS, six are occupied. Two bodies are almost picked clean by the buzzards, kites, ravens, jackdaws and vermin that invade this site. For them an important feeding station especially during the lean winter months. These two young men were killed some weeks earlier during a hunting party foray into the forest. They had surprised a small herd of aurochs and the large bull with a fine set of long horns had stood his ground, charged and gored one unfortunate in the groin and the other was crushed against a large oak. An unusual occurrence but the rogue aurochs was finally overcome with our honed spears and his massive horns displayed in my father's house as a lesson to us all. Nothing of this huge animal was wasted, even the dogs feasted. It will feed us for weeks and provide us with clothing and footwear now the hide has been scraped and dried by the women.

Continued ...

Monument by Carole Barfoot, continued

ANOTHER PLATFORM holds the excarnated bodies of a young mother, no more than fifteen years old who died in childbirth, and her newborn infant son. A sad day for the village only a short time ago and a great loss to our community for her work input and for the continuation of the tribe. Three other platforms hold bodies in various states of decay, one man and two women who died through illness or longevity.

I AM THE SECOND son of the Shaman and I will inherit the ceremonial cloak, the bow and arrows and the stone axes to denote my position as head of the extended community. The first born son is blind, has deformed limbs and cannot take his place in the line of succession. To ensure he would not pass any of his bad blood to other generations my father castrated him soon after his birth. He should have been left at the Monument to die when he was born but my mother's first child was long awaited and she could not bear to part with him. Despite his best efforts to persuade my mother to give him to the Gods my father relented. The child survived and his knowledge of herbs is outstanding, he is a healer and a valuable asset to our community as our medicine man.

AT THE NEXT full moon we will light a huge bonfire and cook wild boar, cattle and sheep in celebration of the departed Chief's long life. Deer will be sacrificed to our Gods and I will read the entrails to determine the future. News of my fathers' death was quickly sent along the High Path to the other settlements and they will join in the celebration of his life and my accession as Chief and Shaman. They will drive some of their animals along the High Path, some over several days, to contribute to the feasting. It is a great responsibility to protect and lead these people and my father performed his duty with much skill and this will be a sign of respect for his leadership.

WE ARE ALL RELATED through our womenfolk. At our large gatherings at the end of Winter

and after Harvest our girls of child-bearing age are exchanged amongst the settlements to keep our blood clean. Negotiations had taken place at the time of their birth and they take with them some of our new breeding livestock ensuring our animals remain free of disease or malformation. This exchange maintains peaceful relations with tribes as far as we can see, to the horizon and beyond, because everywhere we will have a daughter, sister, aunt, niece or cousin who has living memory of us. Now I am Chief I can take another wife and I have chosen a young, childless widow from one of our furthest settlements whose husband died fighting at the fringes of our territory against a conflicting domain. I knew him well and he would be pleased his wife was coming into the premier settlement as a wife of the new Chief. May I have many more sons to hunt and farm and daughters to exchange with our friends.

WHEN MY FATHERS' BONES have been cleaned by the birds I will remove them from the litter, carefully looking under the platform for the small bones of his feet and hands which always slip between the weave in the litter or are scattered by wind and rain. I will take them home to cut them free from any sinews that may still hold them firm and wash them carefully in the spring. The women will dry them and only then will they be deposited in the Monument at a full moon.

THE MONUMENT is at the highest point on the hill above our settlement, seen and seeing, a marker for all travellers coming to feast and honour our rituals. The High Path leads to it, the sacred path that connects us to family north and south, well trodden since time began. The first tomb was built in the time of my grandfather's grandfather when he was still a young boy and finished when he was our Chief. His were the first bones to be deposited in the small wooden box together with those of his senior wife who killed herself on his death, their bond was

Continued ...

Monument by Carole Barfoot, continued

so strong. The bones of several other important community leaders were placed in the Old Monument before it fell into disuse only a few short years after it was built.

MY GRANDFATHER'S GRANDFATHER when a much older Chieftain, persuaded the Elders and sub-chiefs the Monument was not imposing enough for such an important person as himself and set about calling on the surrounding dignitaries to send fit, young males and slaves after harvest to build the new Monument to mainly his design. Stone was quarried and dressed, ditches were dug, chalk was brought to site and the build progressed slowly until the Spring when the site was abandoned until after the following harvest. Back they came and worked hard all through the colder months with many injuries and some fatalities. Stone chambers appeared with shelving for the storage of our ancestors' bones. A capped roof of stone was raised and the holes for the six massive guard stones to the entrance were dug. The sarsens were dragged and heaved into place with much sweat and swearing. Finally the tomb was covered with earth and topped with chalk rubble dug from surrounding hillsides with deer antlers, cows shoulder bones and flint tools. The tomb was magnificent. It was a wonder. It shone on the hilltop in its large treeless clearing as it does still today. An auspicious site, sacred but also a place for feasting, dancing and worshipping our Gods with sacrifice and blood-letting.

UNFORTUNATELY that Chieftain did not live long enough to see the completion of his mausoleum but his son did and was the first of our family to be interred. When my turn comes to return to the Hunting Grounds mybones will also be lovingly honoured and placed with reverence into its hallowed safe-keeping.

MANY PEOPLE travel along the High Path, some from other lands who bring weapons made of a type of stone we have not seen before. Finely worked black arrowheads and spearheads, pure black axe heads that are smooth and shine in the sun. It is called obsidian and is not found here. These are objects we admire and willingly trade food or animals for such exquisite treasures. These strangers often stay with us for some days helping out with harvest or lambing sheep in our good pastures. All are welcome, we can feed and shelter them before they move on or even decide to stay and settle with us. They are different from us, darker skinned, with black hair and very dark brown, almost black eyes. They bring news as they pass along the High Path from settlement to settlement and tell us tales around the fire of crossing huge waters which we cannot drink and strange animals we don't believe exist. They like our women, especially those with blue-eyes, rarely seen in their part of the world. If they are lucky they will take a barren woman that has been cast-out by her husband, but the handsome stranger manages to give her strong, healthy sons with lusty lungs, olive skin, dark hair and blue-eyes.

LIFE FOR US HERE is hard at times; when there is snow on the ground and the fires are low and wood has to be collected and seasoned, when water has to be brought in skins from the springs, when our meat and grain stores are almost depleted or eaten by weevils or animals die for no reason we understand. But the joys of living in the folds of these hills, overlooked by our ancestors in the gleaming Monument on our sacred ground, outweighs our hardships and we will continue our life's cycle with hope.

Carole Barfoot



Photo Verity Cavanagh

USHMA SARGENT submitted a tapestry (top left) 'Avebury Wishing Trees' to the 2021 Swire Ridgeway Arts Prize. I was really taken with it. However, I had only seen it as part of a collage of photographs, without its title; I had no idea if Ushma's image was real or imaginary. Also, I did not understand the inspiration for what seemed to be red hot molten earth beneath the roots. Earlier this year James Rawlings submitted a photo (top right) to the Ridgeway and Ancient Tracks of Britain Facebook page. So, I now knew that Ushma's tapestry was of the Avebury Wishing Trees. Then Giles Watson submitted a poem about the self-same trees, with accompanying painting, to this year's Swire Prize (below, bottom), as part of a collection of illustrated poems. This encouraged me to look up the Wishing Trees online. There I found a photo from Country Life in which vibrant red autumn leaves had settled amongst the roots exposed at the surface, which explained the 'red hot' earth in Ushma's tapestry.



Roots of Avebury

Roots of beeches span the Earth
At Avebury - in leafy shade -
Encase the rampart - clutch and fuse
Solid - where the green boles stand -

As though they simmered - out of loam -
Solidified - and held
The Soil in a loving grip
Nurturing the Mold -

Folding - in their slow embrace
The antler pick and stone
Waiting for some heaving Birth -
Or for an Age - to turn -



Scrub clearance on and near the Ridgeway

Volunteers of the Ridgeway and Thames Path Volunteers were active in January on the Ridgeway and on the chalk slopes below.

One location was near Wayland's Smithy. "We were knocking back encroaching scrub and brambles along the Ridgeway from where the B4000 intersects the Ridgeway at Ashbury to Waylands Smithy," said Lucy Duerdoth, who manages the volunteer programme. "We stopped at Waylands Smithy for lunch whilst the sun was shining!"

Lucy Duerdoth taking a group selfie at Waylands Smithy.



The other work site was Wixen's Bush, a Local Wildlife Site (LWS) that falls mostly within the boundary of the Ridgeway between Sparsholt Firs and the Blowingstone.

"The recent (last year) re-survey by Berks Bucks Oxon Wildlife Trust and Thames Valley Environmental Records Centre had recommended that in order to maintain the precious chalk grassland species present in this LWS, the scrub needed to be knocked back as it is now encroaching significantly, preventing much needed light from getting to the more delicate chalk grassland plant species," said Lucy.

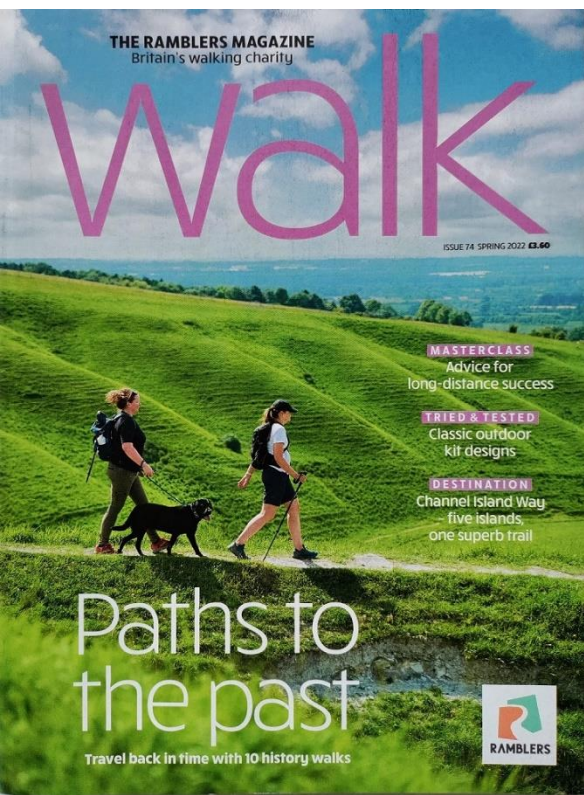


"So this was a slightly different task for the volunteers as it wasn't strictly about access, more habitat management, but they all seemed to enjoy the day, and the sun even came out for the afternoon."

In early April Lucy Duerdoth sent out the task diary for May and June. "As you can see May and June marks the start of the mowing season, so its mowing, mowing and more mowing really!" Tasks are split evenly between the Ridgeway and Thames Path in this period – 9 tasks apiece, plus two days in the workshop at Sutton, near Eynsham.

Clearing scrub at Vixen's Bush (top), and the lunch break (bottom).

Whitehorse Hill and the Ridgeway take pride of place in *walk* magazine



Oxfordshire featured prominently in the spring issue of Ramblers *walk* magazine. Whitehorse Hill takes pride of place on the cover. More precisely the walkers are descending the Hill, with the Giant's Fingers (or Steps), in the background, above The Manger. An aerial shot of the Ridgeway featured on page 74, with the western corner of Uffington Castle just out of shot on the right. The White Horse itself was not to be outdone; it features on page 30 in a photo feature on 'Walks through time'.



5 White Horse Hill, Oxfordshire
ABOUT The Ridgeway has been trodden since prehistoric times by drovers, those marching to war and, nowadays, hikers. One of the most rewarding stretches can be found in Uffington where a terrific example of chalk art can be seen in the form of a huge white horse, believed to have been carved during the Bronze Age. Alongside it is the dry valley cleaved by permafrost during the last Ice Age – called the Manger. Then there's Dragon Hill where St George is said to have slain the dragon. And there's also the Iron Age hillfort that offers views across six (forgive the pun) neighbouring counties.
WALK IT Begin at the National Trust car park, where the well-signposted trail will lead you onto the Ridgeway for views of the white equine.
FIND OUT MORE nationaltrust.org.uk



This poem 'On the Chalk', written by Giles Watson, is the first in his collection *On the Chalk, Poems for the Ridgeway*, published in 2021. Once resident in Uffington and now living in Western Australia, Giles wrote them "from memory when the borders were

still closed, and they were my own way of bridging the distance between here and the places that I love."

Most of Giles' walks were along the Ridgeway between Segsbury Camp and Avebury.

On the Chalk

Giles Watson

I never took for granted
When I was on the Chalk
The ancient generations
Who shared my lonely walk

Whose feet trod down as mine did
The chalk back into stone
Who left their buried relics
Of antler and of bone

Who hauled the heavy sarsens
To stand there by the Tomb
Who piled the chalk on chieftains
And made the Earth a womb

Who cast up rippled ramparts
For forts halfway to Sky
Who pressed the fossil urchins
Into a Horse's eye -

A Horse whose back still arches
The curvature of Downs
Where pinks of orchids stipple
The paler greens and browns

Who rises on her haunches
Upon the earthen Stair
Rearing and careering
Launching into air -

And still I stand there yearning
In the spirit - for the Place
Where my soul spires up to Heaven
And the Track lifts into Space -



Front cover of *On the Chalk, Poems for the Ridgeway*



Photo Giles Watson