

Friends of the Ridgeway

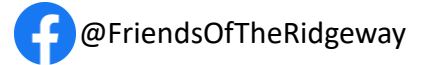


Autumn
2022



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www.ridgewayfriends.org.uk



Welcome

Editor Dave Cavanagh
davecavanagh1000@gmail.com



Articles were written by the editor, Dave Cavanagh, 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 of the Ridgeway or nearby countryside, villages and events? Do share them with us.

Cover photo by Dave Cavanagh, on the Ridgeway, at the western approach to Whitehorse Hill.

THE RIDGEWAY NATIONAL TRAIL IS 50 YEARS-OLD IN 2023

It was in September 1973 that the Ridgeway National Trail was officially opened with a ceremony at Coombe Hill, Buckinghamshire. Throughout next year the Ridgeway Partnership will be running lots of celebratory events and activities to raise awareness of many aspects of the Trail. Finishing touches are being put to the events between now and the beginning of next year. Details will then be put on the Trails page for the [anniversary](#), and will be promoted using social media.



The 50th anniversary webpage

https://www.nationaltrail.co.uk/en_GB/ridgeway_anniversary2023/

Friends of the Ridgeway has produced 12 easy self-led Monthly Challenges – things to look out for - for visitors all along the Ridgeway. They are aimed at various demographics, including people with a disability, families and groups of youngsters e.g. schools, scouts.

The anniversary patron is Mary-Ann Ochota
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mary-Ann_Ochota and
<https://www.maryannochota.com/>



You'll find back issues of the FoR newsletter on our website [here](#)

Several photographs in this issue are from the 'Ridgeway and Ancient Tracks of Britain' Facebook page (and have RWATB in their caption).

Still a way to go

Dave Cavanagh

AFTER 25 YEARS of campaigning the Friends of the Ridgeway's objective for the Ridgeway to be free of recreational vehicles (including motor cycles) was achieved for Oxfordshire in 2006 and, around that time, most of the remaining byway sections in Wiltshire and West Berkshire were closed to traffic in the winter, to protect them from the worst rutting and quagmires (for which thanks to the Councils concerned). Since then we have been collectively stuck in a rut of a different kind: there has been little progress on closing the remaining byway sections to traffic in summer. Before examining how we might rectify that situation, let's look at what FoR did after the momentous achievements of the noughties.

HAVING HELPED to shape the Ridgeway as a Trail exclusively for people on foot, bicycle, mobility scooter, horse and horse carriage, the Friends shifted its focus to the promotion and enhancement of the Ridgeway experience. Our Swire Ridgeway Arts Prize, which we shall be holding again in 2023, was one innovation that FoR could drive itself, thanks to generous funding from the Swire Trust. For the rest, an organisation with greater resources was required. Natural England (NE) provided the opportunity.



Kite Flyers by Michele Green, sculpture category in 2022

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. The seventh Arts Prize Exhibition will be held on Saturday 22 and Sunday 23 April, 2023, in Uffington village hall (the Thomas Hughes Memorial Hall). There will also be a parallel online exhibition.

The theme of the competition is 'Spirit of the Ridgeway'. The aim is to bring 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. You can find guidance and instructions on submitting artworks to the Arts Prize [here](#).



Guardian of the Ridgeway by Karen Vogt, sculpture category 2022

The Ridgeway Partnership

NATURAL ENGLAND, an agency of government (Defra to be precise), and its predecessors, had for many years provided finance to Councils to maintain National Trails to a higher standard than other parts of the public rights of way network.

WITH ITS BUDGET under pressure, NE called in 2013 for a New Deal for National Trails, whereby management responsibility was delegated to new Trail Partnerships. The Friends of the Ridgeway's Chairman and Secretary at the time, Ian Ritchie and Jeff Goddard, respectively, played a major role in setting up the Ridgeway Partnership. Indeed, they became its first chair and secretary, respectively, in 2015. From that moment the Partnership became responsible for the management, improvement, promotion and fundraising for The Ridgeway National Trail.

Who are the partners? A condition of setting up Partnerships was that membership would not only be the six highway authorities through which the Ridgeway ran but also representatives of those who used the Trail. Today this includes the Friends of the Ridgeway, The North Wessex Downs AONB and the Chilterns Conservation Board, the Chiltern Society, the Ramblers, the British Horse Society, the Disabled Ramblers, and the Country Land and Business Association (CLA).

NE RETAINS an overview of the National Trails network as a whole, and provides a base level of grant funding for maintenance of all Trails. The Ridgeway's six highway authorities contribute funding annually, with other partners, including the Friends of the Ridgeway, providing grants for specific projects. The Partnership would achieve little were it not for employing Sarah Wright, the Ridgeway Projects Officer who works closely with Partnership Chair Simon Kearey; a part-time assistant Mary Tebje who focuses on fund-raising and publicity; and 20% of the time of Lucy Duerdoth who manages the volunteers who do so much to maintain both the Ridgeway and the Thames Path National Trails.

The Partnership has identified five themes for the promotion and enhancement of The Ridgeway, building on aspects of its unique appeal. These themes are Natural, Living, Ancient, Sporting and Creative & Spiritual. Under these themes, the work of the Partnership addresses the Trail's biodiversity, landscape character and scenery; country pubs and services; myths and legends; sporting events and family recreation; cultural heritage; archaeology and significant pre-history; and tranquillity.



Moon Hare by Kim Pethybridge, sculpture category 2022



Ripple by Nuno Ferreira, wall art category 2022

Completing the job of getting all of the Ridgeway free of recreational vehicles

Why do this? An obvious reason is that recreational vehicles damage the surface, churning it up into a quagmire and gouging deep ruts, thereby making life very difficult and unpleasant for other users. But it is more than that. The vast majority of users of the Ridgeway are not in or on motor vehicles. We go to the Ridgeway to get away from them, to go along a well-marked, well-maintained Trail through wonderful countryside, with great views – and peace and quiet. Recreational vehicles destroy that.

NATURAL ENGLAND has set [quality standards](#) for the National Trails. The first one is:
“Experience: The trails should be managed in a way which allows as many people as possible to enjoy a wide variety of *walking and riding experiences* [my emphasis] along National Trails and through the English landscape.” Moreover, Natural England states that a key performance indicator is a “Presumption of routes being traffic free.”

CLEARLY, the Ridgeway fails on this quality standard, as do some of the other National Trails that include byways (full name Byways Open to All Traffic, BOAT). There are BOAT sections along the Ridgeway in Wiltshire, West Berkshire and also on the north side of the Thames near Princes Risborough and near Chinnor.

WHILST WE in FoR don't give up hope that Councils will extend their winter bans on recreational vehicles to cover the whole year, we understand their predicament: organisations representing off-road drivers and motor cyclists are well-funded and will fight to retain their right to drive on BOATs. We are hopeful that a recently created body will take up our cause and take it direct to members of Parliament, in both the Lords and the Commons, and to national media.

Continued on next page ...

Quality Standards and	website**	Conservation measures within the trail corridor that protect and/or
	Good range of accommodation in type and price.	appropriate to the geology and soils over which the trail passes. ▪ Readily passable routes free from undergrowth and overhanging vegetation. ▪ Safe road and rail crossings.
Route design and development of associated routes is responsive to changes in use and to new uses.	**KPI: trail condition** Presumption of routes being traffic free.	
KI: level and type use of the trail	Supporting local services (e.g. ferry crossings, transport links, taps) are available and information is up to date and accurate.	
KI: awareness of brand and degree of engagement		



United we stand ...

THE NATIONAL TRAILS are a poor relation in respect of our National Parks and AONBs when it comes to arguing their case. As a start to rectifying this, the NTs have got together to form National Trails UK (NTUK), a charity, which should have more clout than an individual Trail. Our Ridgeway Partnership chair, Simon Kearney, played a major role in getting NTUK off the ground. Simon, who is Treasurer of NTUK, is on NTUK's Advisory Board, as is Sarah Wright, Ridgeway Officer, representing the Ridgeway Partnership. NTUK will have a representative alongside National Parks UK, National Association of AONBs and Natural England on Defra's National Landscapes Partnership Board. Simon considers this to be a significant achievement in terms of powers of influence. Recently the Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra)

gave a grant of £160,000 to NTUK. NTUK and FoR have already, separately, made their views known to Defra on the subject of banning recreational vehicles from National Trails. This we did in response to questions raised by Defra following the publication of the government-commissioned Landscape Review, led by Julian Glover.

AT THE OCTOBER meeting of the Ridgeway Partnership Board we argued passionately that the Partnership should continue to push for NTUK to take this fight to Parliament, and ultimately to Government. The request is simple: change the law to make the NTs compliant with the original vision for NTs: free from recreational vehicles.

FoR's success in 2006 – recreational traffic was banned from the Ridgeway in Oxfordshire – came after some 25 years of campaigning. This was the culmination of several years of lobbying in Parliament in the early 2000s, our then Chair Ian Ritchie and our then President Chris Brasher being to the fore, also attracting much publicity in the press. Chris Brasher was succeeded by Lord (Bill) William Bradshaw, until recently our President, who was very active on this topic in the Lords. Mountaineer Chris Bonington, our Patron, also helped to raise our profile.

From the mid-1990s the topic of motor vehicles on the Ridgeway and other green lanes was discussed in both the Commons and the Lords. In the early 2000s Ian Ritchie 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 Ridgeway.

Getting the issue into the media was also instrumental to bring about change. FoR campaigning was reported in many local papers in the 1980s and the issue of traffic on the Ridgeway made it into national papers in the 1990s, all of which also helped to convince Councils to introduce bans on recreational traffic on the BOAT sections of the Ridgeway in winter.

Through NTUK we need to recapture that campaigning spirit of FoR, with strength in numbers. We need to find appropriate celebrities to help raise the profile of the issue once again, and champions from the various NTs to attract media attention and bend the ear of politicians.

Word play

A bicycle can't stand alone; it is two tired.

A will is a dead giveaway.

Time flies like an arrow; fruit flies like bananas.

A backward poet writes inverse.

In a democracy it's your vote that counts; in feudalism, it's your Count that votes.

A chicken crossing the road: poultry in motion.



And now for something completely different

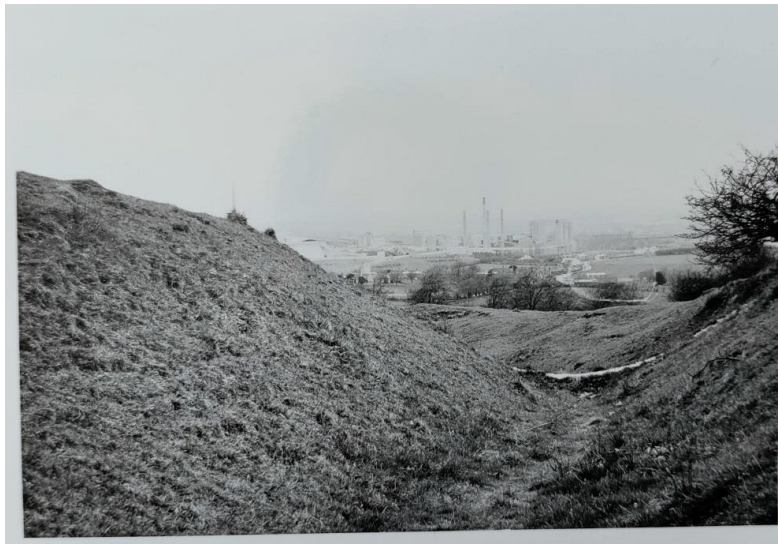


Elvis



Quote by a forest ranger at Yosemite National Park on why it is hard to design the perfect garbage bin to keep bears from breaking into it: "There is considerable overlap between the intelligence of the smartest bears and the dumbest tourists."

The rise and fall of the view from here



It all started with a pack of old black and white photographs. Then one thing led to another.



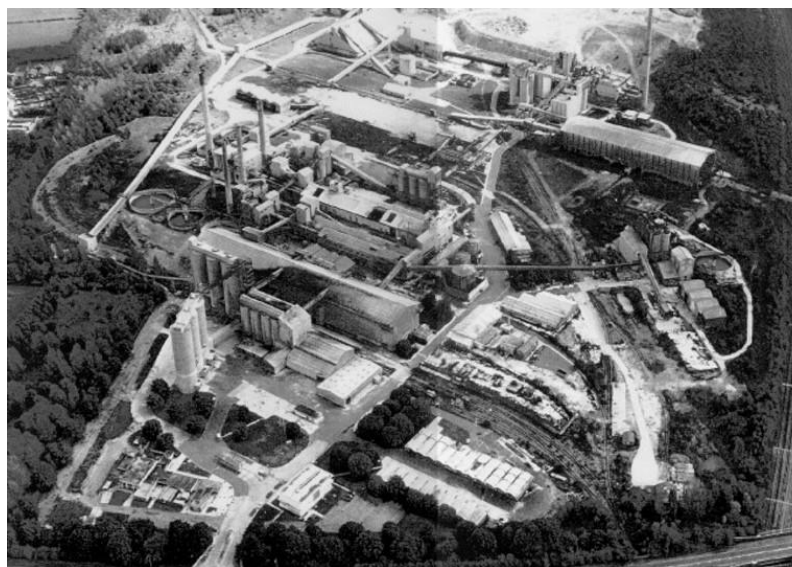
CHRISTINE JAMES, editor of the Icknield Way News, had sent me the photographs. The Icknield Way Association (IWA), Christine told me, had been given a small archive of photographs taken by the late Professor Thurstan Shaw. He was the first chair of the IWA, and later President. He took the photos “when he undertook a solo walk along the Great Chalk Way (as we think of it now) in either 1979 or 1980,” said Christine, who sent me shots taken on the Ridgeway.

ONE OF THURSTAN’S shots, above, showed ghostly towers in the distance. They immediately brought to mind the cooling towers and chimney at Didcot Power Station, which could be seen from various points spread miles apart along the Ridgeway. I say ‘could’ as the last three of the towers came down in 2019, and the great chimney followed a year later.

Didcot Power Station, above, as seen from the Ridgeway above the Harwell Science and Innovation Campus in August 2019. The photos were taken just before and after the final three of the original six cooling towers were demolished. Photos John Gordon

ON THE BACK of Thurstan Shaw’s photo he had written ‘Grim’s Ditch Pitstone Cement Works.’ This was just as well since there are three ‘Grim’s Ditches’ in Oxfordshire.

The cement works was operational from 1937 to 1991. The relative inefficiency of its wet process kilns was offset by the plentiful and relatively cheap supply of high-grade chalk from the foot of the nearby Chiltern escarpment. You can see the group of tall chimneys, visible in Thurstan’s photo, in the top left of the site photo on the right.



I CHECKED an Ordnance Survey map. Sure enough there was a Grim's Ditch, part of it running parallel with the Ridgeway, on Pitstone Hill, overlooking the village of that name, about a mile away – and the site of Pitstone Cement Works.

SINCE DIDCOT Power Station A was no more, though gas-fired Didcot B remained, I wondered if the Pitstone Cement Works was still to be seen from the Ridgeway. 'No' is the answer. In 1989 it had boomed, by 1991 it was bust, mirroring the house-building boom and bust of that time. The plant closed in December of that year. The site is now occupied by houses, community facilities and businesses.

SO, GRIM'S DITCH has survived some 2,000 years, but Pitstone Cement Works came and went in less than 60. But not quite: the Works office building, below, was made a Grade II Listed Building in 1993, and was subsequently refurbished, and is in use to this day.



When a trench is dug, especially a deep wide one, the spoil can pile up to form a bank. Or, in other words, when a ditch is dug the spoil can form a dyke. The Anglo-Saxons used the word 'dīc' for the combined ditch-and-bank construct. This was pronounced 'deek' in what is now northern England, and 'deetch' in the south. The word 'dīc' came to be used to refer to either the trench or the bank. The word morphed into modern day dyke (the bank) and ditch (the trench).



The Wessex Ridgeway is part of the Great Chalk Way. In the summer issue we published an article by Gina Hemmings on travelling along the Wessex RW on horseback.

On the next pages Tim Lewis, FoR trustee and champion of the Great Chalk Way, describes walking along it.

One of the objectives of FoR is the promotion of the Great Chalk Way (GCW), which extends from Lyme Regis on the Dorset Coast to finish officially at the small settlement of Holme next the Sea in Norfolk, but in practice Hunstanton is normally regarded as the final destination, being the nearest transportation hub. You can find out more about the GCW on the FoR [website](#) and the GCW [website](#).

"I spent the whole morning building a time machine, so that's four hours of my life that I'm definitely getting back" - Olaf Falafel



Walking the Dorset section of the Wessex Ridgeway

Tim Lewis

THE DORSET SECTION of the Wessex Ridgeway is not for the faint hearted! It is “only” 62 miles, according to the signpost at the Wiltshire/Dorset border of the walk but they are guaranteed to get your heart rate up.

THE SIGNPOST commemorates Priscilla Houston, who designed the route in Dorset, and the official opening of the Dorset section on 16 August 1994. By this time it had been in existence since 1988, when Priscilla’s book entitled “Walk the Wessex Ridgeway in Dorset” was published; this provided a detailed description of the route through Dorset, along with eleven short circular walks incorporating parts of the Wessex Ridgeway. The second edition of her book coincided with the official opening in 1994, by which time the route had been fully waymarked and signposted by Dorset Council.

IN 1996 it was decided that the existing book on the Wiltshire section of the Wessex Ridgeway, written by Alan Proctor, needed to be updated, as considerable interest was still being shown by walkers in the route. The result was “Walking the Wessex Ridgeway in Wiltshire”, written by Brian Panton, which was published in 1998. Sadly both books are now long out of print.



A typical Dorset Council signpost.
Photo Tim Lewis



I first walked the whole Wessex Ridgeway in 2007/8, using the Cicerone guide book on the Greater Ridgeway, written by Ray Quinlan. As this too is out of print I decided to walk the Dorset section again in June and August this year to see how out of date it was, and to improve the waymarking, which from feedback received by other walkers was less than adequate. I found that the route had changed hardly at all, but the description of the route was indeed in need of updating. The result was the revised directions for the Dorset section, in both directions, which are now available on the website of the Long Distance Walkers Association (LDWA). These complement the directions for the Wiltshire section, which have been on the LDWA website for a few years now.

MY UPDATED directions start with the warning that the first stage, from Lyme Regis to Beaminster, is a challenging and lengthy walk which takes you to the top, or near it, of Dorset's two highest hills, and several more as well. It is a very rural route which goes through only two small villages, Wootton Fitzpaine and Synderford, neither of which has a shop, so it would be wise to take food and water with you. And I am not aware of any accommodation options until Beaminster, 20 miles from the start.



View of Combe Bottom between Maiden Newton and Sydling St Nicholas. Photo Tim Lewis

THE WALK (from west to east) starts innocuously enough on the magnificent Cobb in Lyme Regis, and then wanders along the sea front, which you share with hundreds of tourists, depending on the time of year. You then turn down a pleasant residential street beside the River Lim. It is only after you have left Lyme Regis' houses behind that you begin to climb, gradually at first as you pass through the woods on Hole Common, then more steeply as you approach the A35. Crossing this gives you the first of innumerable stunning views along the route.

THE FIRST serious climb is up Lambert's Castle Hill, which at a mere 258m above sea level is only the 9th highest in Dorset, but the views from the top over Marshwood Vale and Lyme Bay are spectacular. However this is just a rehearsal for Pilsdon Pen a few hours later, the second highest hill in Dorset at 277m. This has the added attraction of hosting an Iron Age hill fort on its summit, which I can imagine would have presented a formidable challenge to an invading force.

AS AN ENCORE, a couple of miles later there is a gradual ascent of Lewesdon Hill which at 2 metres higher than Pilsdon Pen is the highest in Dorset, although the route does not take you to its summit. When the slope levels out, you come across an information board about a Belgian Spitfire pilot who crashed on

the hill in 1942, with the forgettable name of Jean Verdun Marie Aime de Cloedt! On a good day there are glimpses of spectacular views on this section through occasional gaps in the woods and hedges on both sides, including of the sea and Golden Cap (191m) to the south, the highest point on the South West Coast Path.

THE FINAL hill on this stage, Gerrard's Hill, makes up for its relatively lowly height (213m) with the very welcome view of Beaminster (which is apparently pronounced 'Beminster' by those in the know) below.

THE SECOND stage, to Sydling St Nicholas, is much less challenging, although it does start with a long, ever steeper climb out of Beaminster to the top of Mintern's Hill. There is then a pleasant walk more or less on the level for a couple of miles before descending a little to go through the hamlet of Toller Whelme (which means the source of the River Toller, now called the River Hooke), then the

house, Hooke Court. The telecoms masts on Rampisham Hill soon come into view, and after passing through Lower Kingcombe and crossing the A356, there are a couple of miles of road walking before arriving in Maiden Newton. This is probably the largest settlement on the route, with several shops and a station, so a good place to recharge your batteries and buy provisions.

INEVITABLY there is another steep climb out of the village to the appropriately named Break Heart Hill on the other side of the A37 (a Roman road), from where there is a steady descent into Sydling St Nicholas, where accommodation can be had at the Greyhound Inn.



View from Break Heart Hill on the descent to Sydling St Nicholas. Photo Tim Lewis.

THE NEXT STAGE, to Shillingstone, is nearly as challenging as the first one, and only a mile shorter. It is also devoid of any villages or accommodation, although The Ibberton pub in the village of the same name is only a mile off route. Once height has been gained out of Sydling, there is the option of making a 1¼ mile detour to Cerne Abbas from Higher City Farm. After this, the route turns determinedly northwards for two miles before veering to the east to glimpse Up Cerne Manor. The nearest the route gets to the famous giant is Giant's Head Farmhouse, about ¾ mile away.

THE NEXT SIGNIFICANT landmark is Bulbarrow Hill, the third highest in Dorset at 274m, which can be easily identified by the two telecoms masts on its summit. These provide a focus point for five miles or so. More wonderful views reveal themselves once you have laboured up to its summit. There is also a hill fort to explore if you have the energy and, more surprisingly, a large wooden cross. Happily a rather pointless diversion to a trig point above Shillingstone has been abandoned, but the steep and stony descent into the village is still very much in place.



View of route up Bulbarrow Hill. Photo Tim Lewis.

THE LAST HILL of note is Hambledon Hill, near the start of the final stage to Ashmore. Although at 192m it is the lowest of them all, the views from the top are just as good, especially as you approach the village of Iwerne Courtney (curiously also called Shroton). Having plunged down into it to cross the A350, there is then yet another climb, up

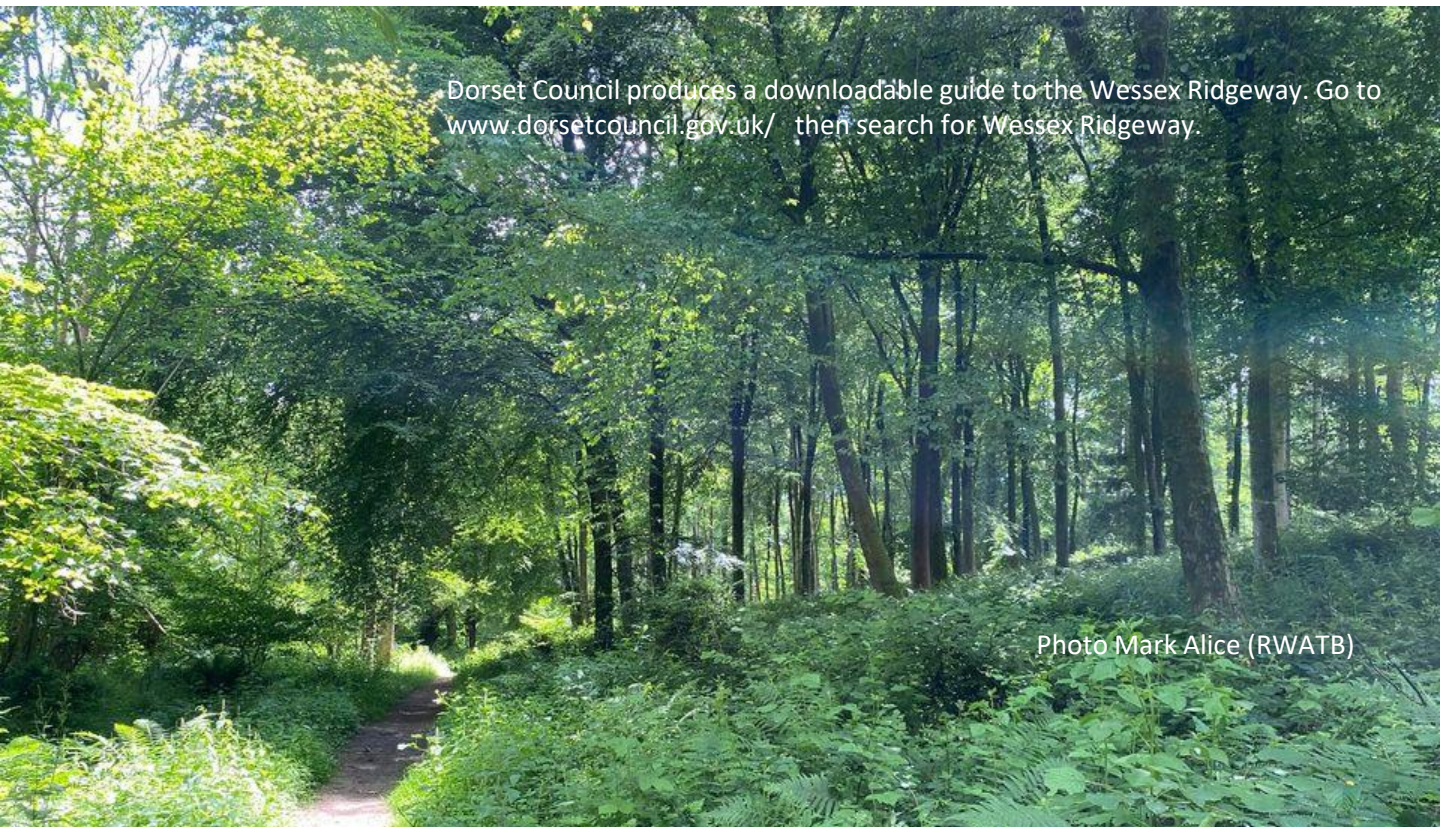
Preston Hill. The last stage from here to Ashmore is my personal favourite of the whole walk as most of it is through ancient woodland. The walk ends with a trudge along a stony track into Ashmore, where its best known feature, its circular pond, was less than half full when I arrived.

How many opticians does it take to change a lightbulb?
Is it one or two? One... or two?



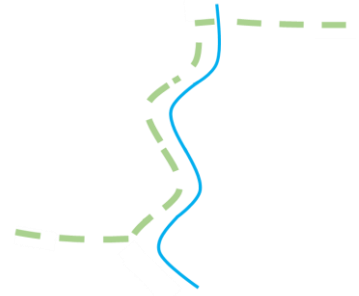
Iwerne Courtney (also called Shroton) from Hambledon Hill. Photo Tim Lewis.

IN CONCLUSION, the Dorset section of the Wessex Ridgeway is well worth the effort, but it requires determination, a reasonable level of fitness and quite a lot of planning to find accommodation and transport to the start and finish points.



Dorset Council produces a downloadable guide to the Wessex Ridgeway. Go to www.dorsetcouncil.gov.uk/ then search for Wessex Ridgeway.

Photo Mark Alice (RWATB)



Mind the Gap

How do you round up free range sausages?
With a Daschund? Photo Dave Cavanagh

Remember airline chaos?



"I saw a flying easyjet but nobody believes me"

"I bet all my answers are correct"

My answers:

✘ Sorry, that's not correct.

Sorry, your answer is not correct.

Correct answer: $\frac{4}{\pi} \sum_{n=0}^{\infty} \left(\frac{(-1)^{n+1}}{(2n+1)^2} e^{-13(2n+1)^2 t} \sin((2n+1)x) \right)$

Your answer: 17

"A gentleman is someone who can play the accordion. But doesn't."

—Tom Waits



The safety warning on ink cartridges needs to be revised

Why were hillforts built along the Ridgeway?

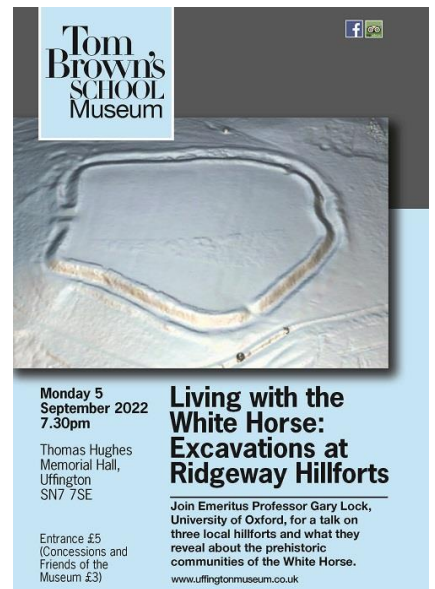
Dave Cavanagh



WE MIGHT all have given voice to this question at one time or another. It was one addressed by Gary Lock, left, during his talk *Living with the White Horse: excavations at Ridgeway hillforts*, in Uffington village hall in early September. As a preamble to answering the question, he dispelled the notion that they were ‘forts’ at all.

GARY, ARCHAEOLOGIST and Emeritus Professor at the School of Archaeology, University of Oxford, has done much research on them. The hillforts that he discussed were three of the many situated in the North Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty: Uffington Castle, Segsbury Camp and Alfred’s Castle. The naming of these ancient monuments as castles, forts or camps goes back to the early 20th century, he said, when they were studied by archaeologists with military experience. It is easy even now to imagine that they were once fortified areas, though there is no evidence to substantiate that claim. So, for what purpose were they constructed?

“**THE DIFFERENCES** between the hill forts are more informative than their common factors,” Gary said. He suggested that hillforts can be considered a ‘social template’, with similar basic elements – ditches, banks and palisades – but built in different ways by different people for a variety of primary purposes. We should keep in mind that the ancient monuments that we see today were not constructed in one go. For example, the first phase of constructing the hillfort on White Horse Hill, Uffington, was in the 7th century BC, with a second phase some 300 years later.



Tom Brown's School Museum

Monday 5 September 2022 7.30pm

Thomas Hughes Memorial Hall, Uffington SN7 7SE

Entrance £5 (Concessions and Friends of the Museum £3)

Living with the White Horse: Excavations at Ridgeway Hillforts

Join Emeritus Professor Gary Lock, University of Oxford, for a talk on three local hillforts and what they reveal about the prehistoric communities of the White Horse.

www.uffingtonmuseum.co.uk

"Did you know, if you get pregnant in the Amazon, it's next-day delivery" - Mark Simmons

THE RESEARCH of archaeologists, including Prof. Lock, indicates that Uffington Castle was not occupied for the 300 years after phase 2. For example, geophysics analysis, of the sort seen on Channel 4's *Time Team*, did not reveal evidence of any houses there.

I ASKED Prof. Lock why had the ancient Britons built ramparts that included palisades – were they useful or ornamental? It is unlikely that they were defensive, he said.

“There were too few people to defend them, and too few to attack them.” And many were not

inhabited. That said, there were lots of farmsteads on the Downs. Prof. Locke posited that the people there would go to some of the ‘forts’ for social gatherings. So, like village halls then? Or pubs.



Uffington Castle, with the Ridgeway going past it. The Ridgeway may once have gone through the hillfort. Photographed by Hedley Thorne, using a drone.



Just a part of the massive Segsbury Camp. Photo Dave Cavanagh.

LARGER even than Uffington Castle, Segsbury Camp, situated on the Ridgeway some 6 miles to the west, has revealed evidence of only 15 ‘round houses or pit groups’, suggesting that it was never really a settlement, not permanently occupied. Rather, Prof. Lock believes that people went back there periodically, re-building shelters for the duration of their visit. There is evidence that they buried offerings in the chalk. Segsbury, he said, was abandoned by the end of the Iron Age, unlike Uffington Castle for which there was continuity of use in Romano-British times, albeit for changed religious practices. It is believed that sheep farming was the focus around Segsbury whereas wheat growing was prevalent around Uffington Castle.

ALFRED'S CASTLE is not on today's Ridgeway, although it is only a mile south of it, within a few hundred metres of Ashdown House, between Ashbury and Lambourn. Alfred's Castle informs the view that the various hillforts were built for different reasons. The ‘fort’ that we see today is much smaller than the other two hill forts, although there was a bigger enclosure associated with it, back in the day, which is difficult to discern now. Also unlike Segsbury and Uffington, Alfred's Castle, constructed in the 5th and 4th centuries BC, had sarsen stones in its ramparts. Of greater interest is the evidence that Alfred's Castle was permanently occupied – it had a different social role to its larger neighbours.



Alfred's Castle. Photo from Wikipedia.

SO, THE ANCIENT BRITS of the last millennium BC had a penchant for constructing flat areas surrounded by ditches and earth mounds, sometimes topped by palisades. But they didn't

all do it for the same reason. After all, the O2 Arena, Wembley Stadium, and the Queen Elizabeth II Centre in Westminster have structural features in common but they serve very different purposes.

Bad news

Not everyone has a good experience on the Ridgeway. John Daly wrote about an experience he had in August, posted on the Ridgeway and Ancient Tracks of Britain Facebook page.



Ridgeway and Ancient
Tracks of Britain

John Daly · Mon at 14:29 · 🌐

I've previously visited at length, Avebury, Stonehenge and their surrounding neolithic landscapes. Wayland Smithy, and the Uffington White horse, but had always wanted to walk the complete Ridgeway. I used this group, the national trail website, and numerous videos to prepare and to inform. What I encountered was nothing like the isolation, peace and freedom of movement conveyed by these sources of information.

I started at Avebury. Maybe because it was Sunday, but the way was filled with cars, motorcycles, tour vans, and tons of bicyclists. I walked as far as passed Barbury Castle, and I didn't have a 5 minute period in which my mind was free to wander as I was constantly dodging vehicles from all directions. Plus, instead of a natural trail surface, I found the way covered in man made

dodging vehicles from all directions. Plus, instead of a natural trail surface, I found the way covered in man made materials, such as asphalt, tar, road gravel, etc. A truly disheartening experience. I've left the trail and won't return. I really regret it. I hope this post helps fellow walkers have a better understanding of the trail conditions and to lower their expectations. Not the National Trail level I was expecting. I did find this lovely scraper though.



Good news

FoR CHAIR Mike Lewington and Secretary Dave Cavanagh attended the autumn meeting of the Ridgeway Partnership Board in October. Here's a selection of the various pieces of good news in the report of Sarah Wright, Ridgeway Project Officer (RO).

THE ORGANISERS of three events on the Ridgeway this year had donated £2,303, which is going towards the design of a new Ridgeway leaflet. The events were: Uptonogood cycling event, Autumn 100, and Race to the Stones ultra-marathon.

THE RO HAD secured a second grant from Natural England to progress the conservation work at Bury Down, bordering the Ridgeway on the western side of the A34. Two plots, created by two farmers around Bury Down, were sown with yellow rattle as part of the cut-and-collect management trials. Yellow rattle reduces the vigour of grasses, helping wildflowers to thrive and reducing mowing requirements. The project also includes an investigation of sustainable disposal of cuttings (Ecotricity gas-from-grass facility near Reading and Laverstoke Park Farm composting site in Hampshire).



Grim's Ditch near Wallingford. Photo Wim Klaucke

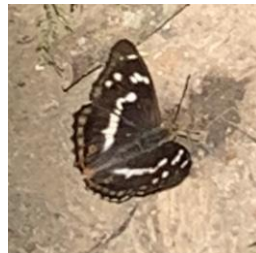
"My attempts to combine nitrous oxide and Oxo cubes made me a laughing stock" - Olaf Falafel

SARAH had also secured match funding from the British Horse Society for a mounting block on the Ridgeway Riding Route near Chequers in Buckinghamshire.

THROUGH RACE to the Stones, Friends of the Ridgeway raised £750 for improvements to the Trail in the World Heritage Site. Fittingly, as reported in the FoR's summer newsletter, this had been raised by the run of Lucy Duerdoth, National Trails Project Volunteer Coordinator.

SOME FUNDING for printing and distributing the new leaflet about driving on the Trail has been offered by West Berkshire Council and Wiltshire Council.

NATURAL ENGLAND have secured funding for all National Trails to deliver accessibility improvement projects on the Trails. This amounts to nearly £12,000 for The Ridgeway and match funding is required as standard. Match funding means that for every £3 given by NE, the RP has to raise £1 from elsewhere.



A rare Purple Emperor butterfly spotted by Peter Skuse on a Ramblers walk near Avebury

The Upper Thames Branch of Butterfly Conservation are producing a species list for The Ridgeway and recommended places along the Trail to look for butterflies for use during the 50th anniversary of the Ridgeway National Trail next year.

IN PARTNERSHIP with Historic England, Sarah had commissioned a vegetation survey of Grim's Ditch Scheduled Monument near Wallingford to inform future management. This work will increase understanding around specialist tree and scrub work which avoids damage to earthworks and opportunities to restore overgrown earthworks to grass.



BBQ for the volunteers who maintain the Ridgeway and Thames Path National Trails

Our capacity to walk along these two National Trails unmolested by overhanging thorny trees, brambles and briars, and plants growing in the paths in summer, is largely down to a band of volunteers who work on both Trails, under the direction of Lucy Duerdoth.



Lucy is employed jointly by the two Trail Partnerships that manage and promote the trails, though the Thames Partnership contributes the lion's share as its income is considerably larger than that of the Ridgeway Partnership.

The BBQ is an annual event to thank the volunteers and to bring them all together with Lucy, the two Partnership officers and members of Oxford County Council's Countryside Access Delivery team who share their workshop near Stanton Harcourt, West Oxfordshire, with the volunteers. Unlike last year it was a mizzly day so the BBQ was held indoors.

Volunteers at Wiltshire's Hackpen Hill

THE MOST RECENT task of the Ridgeway maintenance volunteers was at Hackpen Hill in Wiltshire. They split into two teams. Steve and Roger dug out grips (drainage channels) along parts of the Ridgeway where water was pooling. The two Ians and Paul dug out the old information board there, as it had been driven into and smashed. They then dug in a new replacement board that the volunteers had made in the workshop. The digging was particularly hard as they had to go through chalk.



Out with the old ...



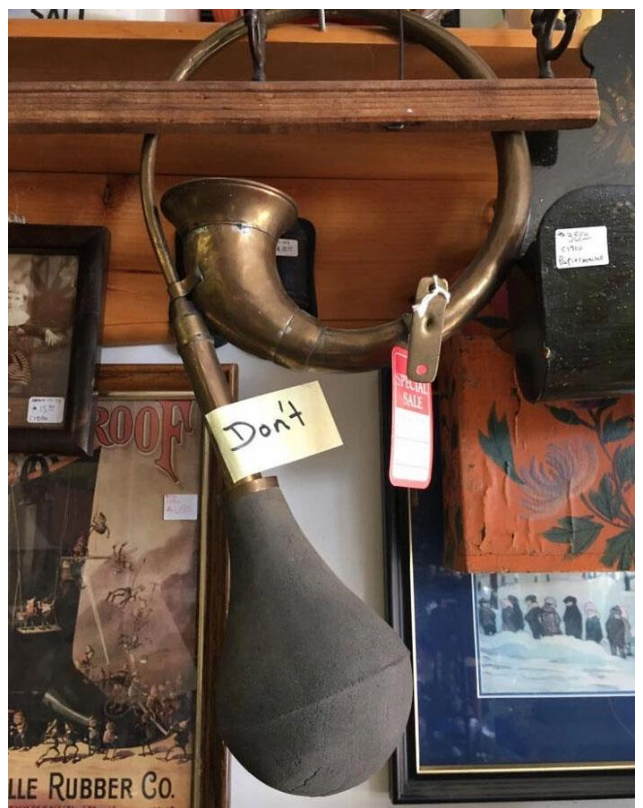
... in with the new

Photos Lucy Duerdoth



Job done

"By my age, my parents had a house and a family, and to be fair to me, so do I - but it is the same house and it is the same family" - Hannah Fairweather



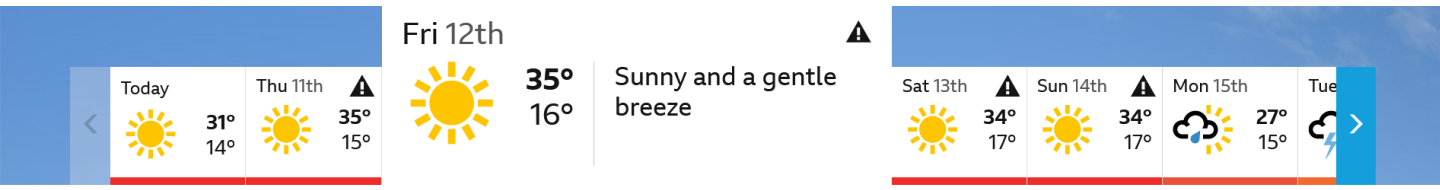
Some Like It Hot (1959)

In The Heat Of The Night (1967)

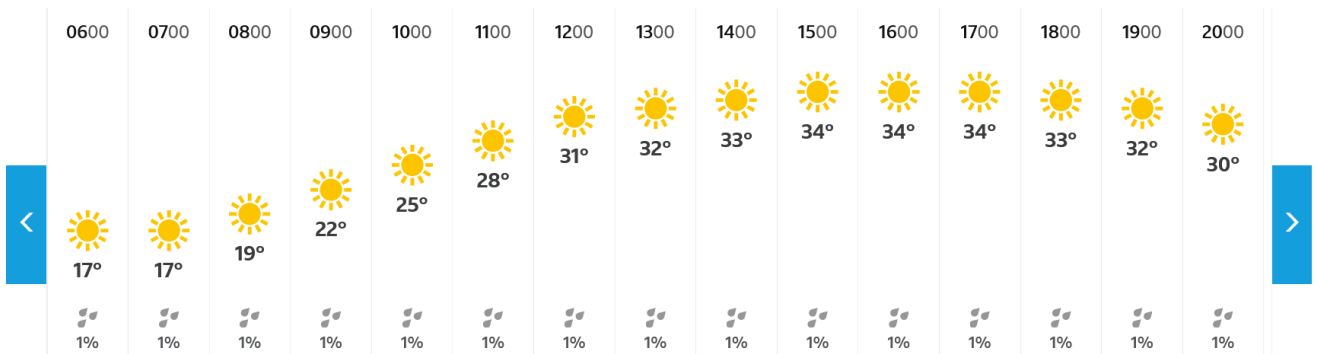


Watch latest forecast: An even hotter day on Tuesday July

What did you do during the unprecedented (isn't everything these days?) heat wave of July (record temperatures), and the one in August (near record temperatures, longer duration)?



Weather warnings issued



August



WATCH: Chris Fawkes with the UK's weather forecast

Summer Heat (2008) Heat (1995)

Heat Wave (1990)

The Heat (2013) The Big Heat (1953)

Heat Lightning (1934)

Body Heat (1953, 1981) City Heat (1984)

Red Heat (1985, 1988) White Heat (1949)

Night Of The Big Heat (1966)

Heatwave: National emergency declared after UK's first red extreme heat warning July