# Friends of the Ridgeway





#### Winter 2024

www.ridgewayfriends.org.uk @FriendsOfTheRidgeway

#### Welcome

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Articles were written by the editor, Dave Cavanagh, unless credited otherwise.

Cover photo: Vale of White Horse Ramblers walking along the Ridgeway over Smeathe's Ridge, Wiltshire

#### **AFTER EIGHT YEARS AS RIDGEWAY OFFICER, Sarah**

Wright is moving on to pastures new.

SARAH was the first Ridgeway Officer (RO) after the formation of the Ridgeway Partnership (RP) in 2015. She put tremendous enthusiasm and energy into the post, with achievements throughout her many responsibilities, and has firmly established the role for her successor. Sarah is resigning from the post at the end of February.

Left to right: Sarah Wright,
Duncan Strutt (FoR Trustee),
Simon Kearey (Chair
Ridgeway Partnership), and
Dave Cavanagh (FoR
Trustee) at the 50<sup>th</sup>
anniversary event on
Coombe Hill, September last
year.



Photo Mary Tebje

SARAH'S RESPONSIBILITIES were many and included responsibility for management of The Ridgeway Trail and associated budgets, its development as a high profile National Trail, and attracting funding to ensure a high quality route and visitor experience. Each of these simple-sounding objectives is, in fact, complex and requires a great deal of input from the Ridgeway Officer.

Continued ....

## The 2024 Friends of the Ridgeway Annual General Meeting will be held online at 7 pm on Wednesday 1 May

i.e. NOT on the weekend of the Swire Ridgeway Prize Exhibition. Joining details will be sent to members nearer the time.

SARAH IS LEAVING because, as with some other National Trails, the funding from Natural England is insufficient to cover core costs, which includes the salary of a Ridgeway Officer. Indeed, Sarah's post was only 4 days/week from the outset, as the original funding from Natural England was insufficient to employ a Ridgeway Officer full time. The value of funding from Natural England to the Partnerships has declined yearly since their formation.



SARAH HAS RAISED funds from several sources, though the largest amounts are for special projects, not for core costs. Her fundraising includes: from organisers of some of the sporting events along the Ridgeway; from HS2 Ltd to help develop an alternative Ridgeway route for cyclists in the Chilterns; from Natural England e.g. for resurfacing work; Historic England for the Historic Ridgeway project; Arts Council England for the Ridgeway 50 Photos project. The Highway Authorities through which the Ridgeway runs have also increased their contributions. Despite this there was a shortfall that could not be bridged: the status quo became unsustainable.

#### SARAH'S FINAL YEAR with the

Partnership, 2023, was the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the opening of the Ridgeway National Trail. Sarah worked indefatigably on this and, supported by Mary Tebje, achieved great coverage in the media for the Trail, to promote the joys of the Ridgeway far and wide. Sarah also brought together representatives of many organisations, who are partners in the success of the Ridgeway, at the celebration on the Ridgeway at Coombe Hill, Bucks, at the end of September, helping to cement us together for future cooperation.

Top, converging on the monument at Coombe Hill for the big group shot. Middle, Sarah getting people in line in front of the monument, with Mary Tebje on the far left.



Above, Sarah talking about progress on the Ridgeway. Behind Sarah is Jo Burgon, the first Ridgeway Officer in 1981-1983. Photos Dave Cavanagh



# Bringing the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Year to a close

On a cold but gloriously sunny day a hardy band of Ridgeway-lovers assembled on Ivinghoe Beacon to bring the Ridgeway National Trail's 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary to a close. The assembly included Anniversary Patron, Mary-Ann Ochota and The Friends of the Ridgeway Chair, Mike Lewington.

The Friends of The Ridgeway

13 December 2023 at 08:59 - 🐯

THE SWORD that is being held aloft is the replica of the Ivinghoe Sword that was cast on Coombe Hill during the anniversary event on 29 September that was 50 years, almost to the day, since the Ridgeway National Trail was first recognised.

AERIAL
PHOTOGRAPHER and
lover of the Ridgeway
and surrounding downs
Hedley Thorne
captured the spirit of
the occasion with a
beautiful, atmospheric
video which you can
see here.

You can see <u>another</u> <u>video</u> in which Mary-Ann brings the celebration to a close.

Before the official Ridgeway National Trail video and photos of the 50th anniversary celebration with volunteers on Monday are published, here are a few of the views we enjoyed on and around lyinghoe Beacon and in lyinghoe village.

Trail volunteer Martin is holding high a copy of the Bronze Age Ivinghoe Sword, while Ridgeway Partnership chair Simon keeps the Golden 50 upright!

Thank you to Des from Daisychain at Ivinghoe Old School Community Hub who produced delicious lunch a... See more Photos on Facebook by Wendy Tobitt





Over summer the Ramblers Vale of White Horse group walked the Ridgeway from end to end.



THEY DIVIDED the Trail into eight sections, four on each side of the Thames, and walked from west to east. I could only make three of the sections, all through the Wessex section. As a reminder of warm summer days that befits a newsletter focused on the Ridgeway, I have reproduced some of my photos.





'Calling Time on Off-roading' is the title of a very readable document recently published by GLEAM, the Green Lane **Environmental Action** Movement, with which The Friends of the Ridgeway has long been associated. GLEAM argues persuasively that piecemeal past, current and future actions to get recreational motor vehicles off green lanes are doomed to failure. Except for one: ban them from all green lanes in one fell swoop by Government legislation.

ORGANISATIONS that represent 4x4 and motor bike users who wish to drive along byways claim that green lanes have been roads for centuries. Consequently they should be permitted to drive along them. GLEAMs says "We use the commonsense, widely understood notion that a 'road' is a tarmacadamed highway." The 'vehicles' on byways in the dim and distant past were carts and carriages, pulled by an animal, a far cry from the powerful motor vehicles of today - damaging, dangerous and noisy.

OFF-ROADING started to become a thing in the 1990s with the increasing popularity of second-hand 4x4s and trail bikes. They quickly ruined the surface of byways, making life difficult for the majority of users – walkers, runners, cyclists, horseriders and, increasingly, users of mobility scooters – and land-owners. It's time to limit the use of byways to those who use them the most.

# Calling time on recreational off-roading

Dave Cavanagh



4x4s and motor cycles on the Ridgeway in West Berkshire, 2023. Photo Dave Cavanagh.

The term 'green lane' has no legal status. It signifies an unsealed countryside track. Green lanes are of two types – the 3,100 miles of 'Byway Open to all Traffic' (BOAT) and the 4,200 miles of Unsealed Unclassified Road (UUR).

There is an established legal right to use a BOAT with any kind of motor vehicle but BOATs are defined in law as 'highways used by the public mainly for the purpose for which footpaths and bridleways are used'. This makes walkers, cyclists and horse riders the majority users of all BOATs.

From Calling Time on Off-roading.

# Where does the Ridgeway fit into this?

Except for a few miles where the Ridgeway National Trail follows tarmacadamed roads, the Ridgeway is a green lane.

WE ARE FORTUNATE that recreational motor vehicles are banned all-year-round from the Trail in Oxfordshire. Not so on BOAT sections in Wiltshire, West Berkshire and Buckinghamshire, where the Ridgeway is open to recreational 4x4s, quad bikes and motorcycles in summer, sometimes all year round. The Friends of the Ridgeway would like this National Trail to be the embodiment of Natural England's ambition for National Trails, namely the "presumption of them being free of recreational motor traffic."

# National Trails are a special case

Clearly it would be ideal if Government were to change all byways simultaneously into restricted byways. Failing that, since one of Natural England's Key Performance Indicators for the National Trails is "Presumption of routes being traffic free", a good place for Government to start would be to ban recreational motor vehicles from all National Trails in one go. The Ridgeway Partnership has raised the issue of recreational vehicles with National Trails UK, the body recently-formed to advocate at high levels for improvements to National Trails.

Natural England's ambition for National Trails "presumption of routes being traffic free"



Quality Standards an

#### website\*\*

Good range of accommodation in type and price.

Route design and development of associated routes is responsive to changes in use and to new uses.

KI: level and type use of the trail

KI: awareness of brand and degree of engagement appropriate to the geology and soils over which the trail passes.Readily passable routes

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free from undergrowth and overhanging vegetation.

Safe road and rail crossings.

\*\*KPI: trail condition\*\*

Presumption of routes being traffic free.

Supporting local services (e.g. ferry crossings, transport links, taps) are available and information is up to date and accurate.

Conservation measures within the trail corridor that protect and/or

Why are recreational vehicles already banned all year round from the Ridgeway in Oxfordshire?

The Ridgeway and some other green lanes were once classified as Roads Used as Public Paths (RUPPs). After much pressure, including from The Friends of the Ridgeway, The Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act (2006) changed all RUPPs into restricted byways, consequently banning recreational vehicles from the former RUPPs, including the Oxfordshire Section of the Ridgeway.

Consider joining GLEAM. Membership is only £10 annually.

You can find out more about GLEAM at <a href="https://www.gleam-uk.org">www.gleam-uk.org</a> or email them at info@gleam-uk.org

# Historic Ridgeway Project Update

#### **Daniel Bashford**

IT'S BEEN quite a busy first 4 months for the Historic Ridgeway Project setting up and sorting out priorities for work, with the 3 project clock vear ticking away in the background! Working closely with Historic England and the wider project steering group we are seeking to make the most meaningful and lasting contribution possible to the conservation of the Ridgeway's exceptional heritage.

#### **Individual sites**

THE PRINCIPLE task has been to look through the Scheduled and non-Scheduled sites and see which sites in most are urgent need of work, and where the best opportunities exist for work to begin quickly. Each of the Scheduled and the sites, key undesignated sites, needs a condition and management plan to inform requirements for each, and these are underway. Whilst these are being

Daniel Bashford is the Project Manager of the Historic Ridgeway Project covering the **National Trail** between Wayland's Smithy and Nuffield, east of Wallingford, funded by Historic England. The principal aim of the project is to improve the condition and management of archaeological sites along the route, both Scheduled and un-Scheduled, and whilst doing so to improve inclusion, interpretation and active participation of local and wider communities in the understanding and care of these sites.

prepared, more obvious works can begin, and those already programmed in for this year include:

Wantage Monument (February 2024). The National Trail volunteers will kindly be clearing back the encroaching scrub and dogwood on the

south and western sides of the monument to allow for better views out from, and towards the monument from along the route and the wider landscape.

Scutchamer Knob / Cuckhamsley Hill 2024). (September National volunteers and those recruited by the project's new volunteer co-ordinator (due to start April 2024) will clear the scrub and saplings from the mound, as training exercise for the new volunteers so that they can benefit from the experience of the existing National Trail team. The volunteers will continue to cut back re-growth in the spring and autumn each year, and the local scout group, named after the mound (1st Cuckhamsley) will mow the internal area in the summertime to allow access into the centre of the site.

#### **Designation review**

NUMBER of the Scheduled Monuments along the route are what are known as Old County Numbers (OCNs), they are sites for which there has been no review of the Scheduling in many cases for decades, and their descriptions are not currently publicly available (indeed many are only a single sentence description). Those put forward for review include Scutchamer Knob with its deep and rich history, and East Hendred Down Barrow which is Scheduled as a Bronze Age bowl barrow, but is actually a Roman double horse burial (photograph on next page).



A Roman double horse burial on East Hendred Down.

#### Interpretation and Education

A sub-group of the steering group has been set up to discuss ideas around interpretation, both physical and virtual, and Natural England have made a donation towards the production of a common design for all the boards we hope to erect along the route.

We are applying for grant funding for individual boards along the trail but they will all match this design.

We are also applying for grant funding for virtual interpretation such as a storymap (an example may be found here <u>Tour of Swindon Heritage Action</u> Zone (arcgis.com))

WE ARE DEVELOPING a programme with Historic England's Heritage Schools team, to bring teachers from Swindon and Oxford to the Ridgeway this summer to show them sites that they can then practically use illustrate historic periods in the teaching of the Key Stages.

WORKING WITH local secondary schools we hope to have some of the students undertaking some research to help inform exhibitions about the project over the next vear at the Vale and Downland and West Berkshire museums. I'm also slowly trying to visit the primary schools in the project area to explain the heritage of the Ridgeway in each Parish to the children. I've only managed one visit so far to The Hendred's School in East Hendred, talking about Scutchamer Knob. I'm sure you'll agree that the picture by a pupil in

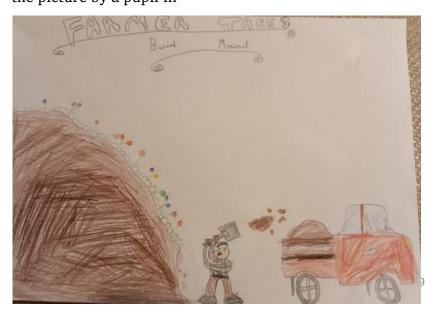
Class 4 captures beautifully the digging out of the mound in around 1841 by the farmer who owned it!

#### Inclusion and diversity

WE ARE CONTINUING to contact a wide variety of groups, and we are working with local. regional and national partners to increase the diversity of those engaging with the Ridgeway and its heritage. Once the new project volunteer coordinator is in place in April, this work will with accelerate the recruitment of volunteers.

For further information, please contact me at <a href="mailto:daniel.bashford@oxfordshire.gov.org.uk">daniel.bashford@oxfordshire.gov.org.uk</a>

The project website, a work in progress, may be found here <a href="https://www.nationaltrail.co.uk/en\_GB/trails/the-ridgeway/historic\_ridgeway/">https://www.nationaltrail.co.uk/en\_GB/trails/the-ridgeway/historic\_ridgeway/</a>





# The theme for the 2024 Swire Ridgeway Arts Prize is

# Signs and symbols along the Ridgeway

Entry forms must be submitted by 25 March
Details are on The Friends of the Ridgeway website

27 & 28 April 2024, Thomas Hughes Memorial Hall, Uffington. 10 am to 5 pm, admission free.

Most of the exhibits will be for sale.

The 2024 Friends of the Ridgeway Annual General Meeting will be held **online** on Wednesday 1 May at 7 pm, **NOT** on the weekend of the Swire Ridgeway Prize Exhibition. Joining details will be sent to members nearer the time.

# Exhibition in Newbury

Nick Schlee is an artist who has made the landscape around the Ridgeway a favourite subject. He has an exhibition of his paintings at the West Berkshire Museum, Newbury, until the end of March 2024. The exhibition features oil paintings of various views along the Ridgeway between Streatley and Avebury. Here is a link to a catalogue of his work in the exhibition.

Look again: this green leaf is actually a brimstone butterfly feeding on toadflax on the Ridgeway at Bury Down. Photo Wendy Tobitt.



#### A Thousand Miles

... is a song by Vanessa Carlton, a world-wide hit when released in 2002. In it she says that she'd walk a thousand miles "if I could just see you tonight."

THIS ARTICLE is about a more modest distance, 40 miles in fact. Before that, however, the number 1000 does have particular relevance to the Ridgeway as the organisers of The Ridgeway 40 Walk have donated £1,000 to The Friends of the Ridgeway. Since 1962 they have put on an annual not-for-profit 40-mile walking/running event along the Ridgeway from Avebury to Streatley. They had built up a modest surplus in their account and so they very kindly donated £1,000 to FoR to support our work to preserve and enhance the Trail and people's experience of it.



The challenge of The Ridgeway40 Walk is to complete it, on foot, in a single day.

The organisers provide support

#### The 2024 Ridgeway40 Walk is on Saturday 11 May

To find out more and to enter the event go the Ridgeway40 website

http://www.ridgeway40.co.uk/

The Ridgeway 40 is one of many challenge walks of varying lengths held throughout the UK. These walks are, as far as possible, cross country, using public rights of way or across land which is open to the public. Walkers are expected to follow the route set by the organisers and will usually receive a certificate if they complete it within the time specified in the rules of the particular event.

Generally, long distance challenge walk organisers will provide the following:-

- · Checkpoints to monitor the progress of walkers
- Sustenance at checkpoints, which could include water, squash and food
   Fist Aid kit is available at the check points
- Route map or written description to enable walkers to follow the designated route (the Ridgeway) Walk map is downloadable from this web site).
- · A certificate for all entrants who complete the walk in the specified time
- · Commemorative badges are for sale (see the various types)

Please share this information with relatives and friends who may be interested in The Ridgeway40 challenge.



Ridgeway
50 Photos

IN THE AUTUMN ISSUE of the FoR

newsletter we described the Ridgeway 50 Photo project. To encourage everyone to look closely and photograph what they see on the Ridgeway, professional photographer Matt Writtle will be sharing vlogs about his work on the Ridgeway and exhibiting a collection of photographs along it and on social media. There will also be free outdoor photography workshops provided by Sharpshots to specifically encourage youngsters.

New display boards are required for exhibiting Matt's photos so Friends of the Ridgeway have offered a grant of £3,415 towards the cost.

You can read more about the Ridgeway 50 Photos on the Trail's website

www.nationaltrail.co.uk/ridgeway/50Pho tos

Watch Matt's latest vlog.

Horse on a white transporter, Uffington.
The red kite-eyed amongst you will spot a white horse on the downs behind and to the right – the Uffington White Horse.









## How many National Trails cross a golf course?

I'll accept any answer as I have no idea

The Ridgeway crosses Streatley golf course. We kept a good lookout as we crossed, though not until we had activated the sophisticated early warning system.



Three tiered greens. Somebody must do a roaring trade in lost golf balls.







A warm autumnal welcome to our latest Hall of Fame members, Jenaya and Dean who completed the Trail in October. "We really enjoyed our autumn adventure, the route is simply stunning from start to finish and a great chance to reconnect with nature. A memorable moment was meeting a fabulous Ridgeway volunteer who told us how much he enjoyed seeing the trail in use." We also enjoy hearing from our wonderful Trail community and are so pleased you enjoyed your time in the beautiful countryside.



Ridgeway National Trail added a new photo to the album .... Ridgeway Hall of Fame.

★ Favourites · 5 h · 🕄

Congratulations to our 32nd Hall of Fame members! Deb enjoyed the beautiful views across the whole walk and told us: "Experiencing the well maintained route especially through Goring & Streatley, the woodlands, seeing Chequers, White Horse Hill, Avebury stones and lyinghoe beacon. A few tough hills but loved the whole chalk walk!"



#### According to Barry Cryer ...

A wife is in the bathroom trying on a new dress. She comes out and says to her husband: 'Does my bum look big in this?' He says: 'Oh be fair, love, it's quite a small bathroom.

Picasso was burgled and did a drawing of the robbers. Police arrested a horse and two sardines.

A man is driving along a country road when he runs over a cockerel.
He goes to the farmhouse and knocks on the door.
A woman opens it and he says: "I appear to have killed your cockerel. I'd like to replace him."
She replies: "Please yourself, the hens are round the back."



Ridgeway National Trail added a new photo to the album Ridgeway Hall of Fame.

★ Favourites · 2 d · ③

Not only has Harriet completed our Trail, running in three days this past weekend, she is also one of the amazing volunteers. "I love being on the Trail and really appreciate all the maintenance from my fellow volunteers to keep it passable." Congratulations and welcome to the Ridgeway Hall of Fame.



If you're being chased by a police dog, try not to go through a tunnel, then on to a little seesaw, then jump through a hoop of fire. They're trained for that! – *Milton Jones* 

#### Volunteers above the mire

IT IS BELIEVED that although the Ridgeway was an all-year-round route for thousands of years, it was particularly useful in the wet months of the year when travel through low-lying country was dogged by marshy conditions. So, Lucy Duerdoth's message in December to the Ridgeway and Thames Path National Trail Volunteers, describing the work schedule for the following couple of months, drew a parallel with days of yore. "We'll be carrying on with our hard vegetation cutting mostly and focusing on the Ridgeway as I suspect various bits of the Thames Path will be going under water over Christmas and the new year, if they haven't already! We'll also carry on with installing the Ridgeway fingerposts the workshop volunteers have been busy making."

Lucy Duerdoth, right, with two of the Volunteers who made the big 50 for the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Ridgeway National Trail.











Brett Thorne (above), Keeper of Archaeology at the <u>Discover Bucks Museum</u>, showed a replica of the Ivinghoe Sword during the celebration, and Will Lord, of Will Lord Prehistory, and a colleague made a replica sword in front of us. You can watch a video of them doing that <u>here</u>. The rough sword was then transformed into the smooth, sharp, gleaming that was held aloft at the closing ceremony on the Beacon on 11 December.

### Other features of the Coombe Hill celebration

British mountain biking began in the Chilterns - Graham Wallace

Tips on dog walks from Clinical Dog Behaviourist, Heather Taylor

The joy of running on the Ridgeway – Nick Stallman and his local club

# See how a sword is cast

**ONE OF THE FEATURES** of the celebration in September on Coombe Hill, Bucks, of the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Ridgeway National Trail (video here) was the casting of a replica of the Ivinghoe Sword. This late Bronze Age sword, made around 1000 BC, was found by the Ridgeway on Ivinghoe Beacon, the northern end of the Trail. According to the Discover Bucks Museum the Bronze Age is when, for the first time, swords were made. Unlike like other handheld objects e.g. those for hunting or tools for doing jobs, swords were made specifically to fight other humans.

You can read more about the Ivinghoe Sword and other artefacts found along the Ridgeway on the Trail's website.

You can read more on these by following links in the December online newsletter of the Ridgeway National Trail. If you do not already receive a copy and would like to, ask Sarah Wright, the Ridgeway Officer, to put you on her distribution list.

Ridgeway@oxfordshire.gov.uk



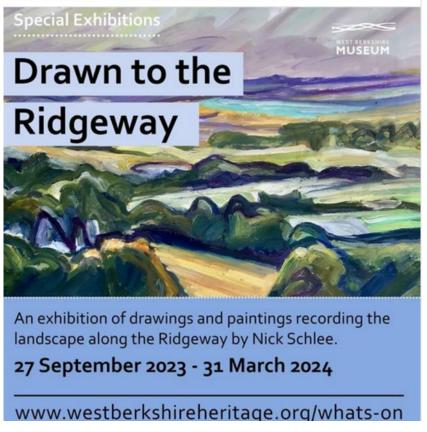




Berkshire artist Nick Schlee is 'Drawn to the Ridgeway' as you can see in his wonderful paintings and drawings of the Ridgeway currently on show at West Berkshire Museum. Nick works at speed outdoors on the Ridgeway to capture all the essential spirits of the scene he is looking at.

West Berkshire Museum in the middle of Newbury is a great place to visit and discover so many treasures from the Ridgeway landscape.

https://booking.westberks.gov.uk/heritage\_events.html..... See more



A man was marooned on a desert island. One day a beautiful woman arrives in a wet suit. "When did you last have a smoke?" she asks. "Five years ago." So she gets out a cigar and he smokes it. She unzips her wet suit a bit and says, "When did you last have a drink?" He said, "Five years ago." So she gets out a bottle of Scotch and he has a drink. Then she unzips her wet suit a bit more and says, "And when was the last time you played around?" He looks at her in amazement and says: "You're not telling me you've got a set of golf clubs in there?" – Ronnie Corbett



#### **UK Hillforts**

Hedley Thorne · 31 December 2023 at 17:27 · ❸



Happy new year to hillforters near and far! All the best for 2024 everyone, thanks for making this such a special group. (picture-Rybury Camp hillfort, summer evening, Wessex Airscapes exhibition walk)





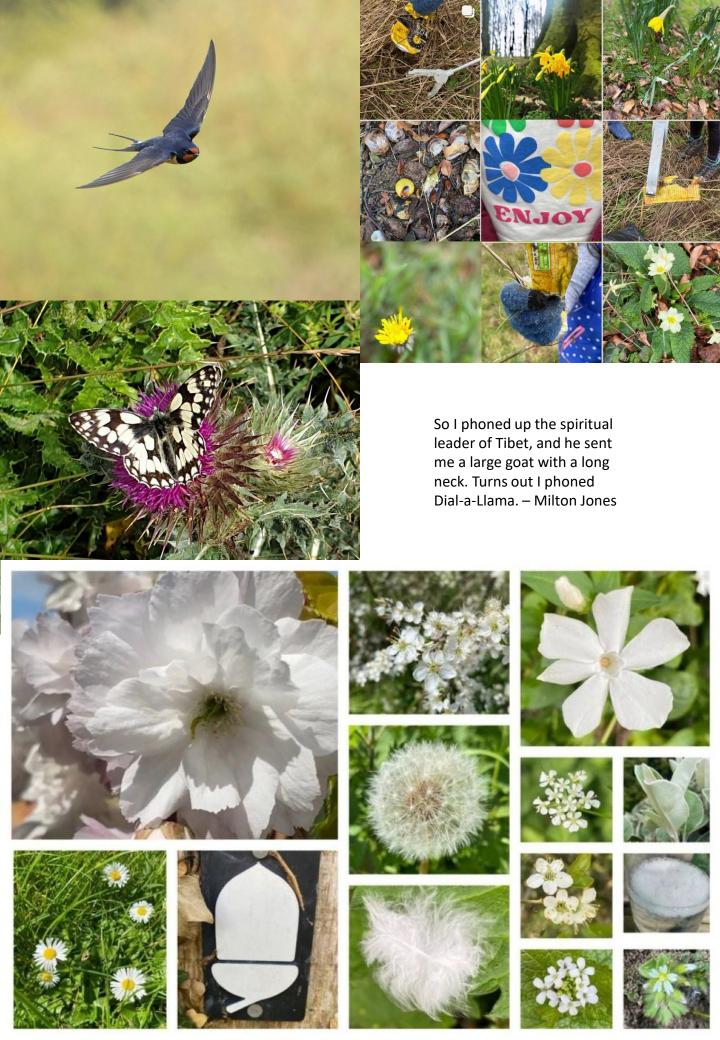
**UK Hillforts** 



Many of you will be familiar with the spectacular photos of downs lover Hedley Thorne. Hedley recently formed a Facebook page 'UK Hillforts', which is attracting lots of contributions, with over 13,000 members already.

AS MANY OF YOU ARE AWARE, The Friends of the Ridgeway, with Sarah Wright and Mary Tebje, created 12 themes for the monthly #RidgewaySpotter collections of photos sent in by fans of the Ridgeway. Wendy Tebitt curated these and posted them on The Friends of the Ridgeway Facebook page throughout 2024. Below are some of Wendy's selection posted on Facebook on 27 December.





#### Look at things differently ...

