

Friends of the Ridgeway




February 2025



Winter 2025

www.ridgewayfriends.org.uk

 @FriendsOfTheRidgeway

Welcome

Editor Dave Cavanagh
davecavanagh1000@gmail.com



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

Cover image: archaeologist Dan Bashford relates the history of Scutchamer Knob to the Vale Path Volunteers.

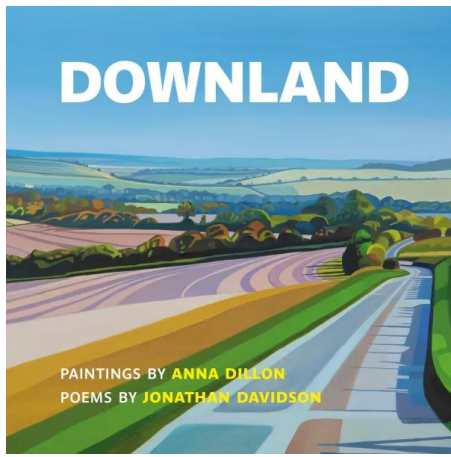


Artist [Anna Dillon](#) and poet and writer [Jonathan Davidson](#) were the presenters of the first of this year's [Richard Jefferies Society](#) Lectures. The focus was on their book *Downland*, which was published last year. It contains some of Anna's evocative paintings of the North Wessex Downs, which inspired Jonathan's poetry



The Icknield Way, by Anna Dillon.

Jonathan grew up in Didcot, and the Downs a short way south of the town formed the "landscape of my childhood". He then moved away. Much later he read the book *Middle Ridgeway*, published in 2016, and written by Eric Jones and Patrick Dillon, illustrated by Anna, which reminded him of "where I came from." One of Anna's paintings is *The Icknield Way*, showing the stretch above Upton village in South Oxfordshire.



This is the very stretch that poet Edward Thomas Jr. walked along when he walked the ancient Icknield Way in 1911, after which he wrote the book 'The Icknield Way'. The stretch in Anna's painting is a byway now and a strategic cycle link for all the people working at Harwell. This artwork chimed with Jonathan's experience as a boy cycling with his dad. Jonathan subsequently contacted Anna with a view to working together, the result being *Downland*.

Downland is published by Two Rivers Press. You can read more about the book, the artist and poet on the [publisher's website](#).



Emma Williams. Segsbury Castle

The Annual Swire Ridgeway Arts Competition

April 26th -27th 2025. Theme: 'Colours and Hues of the Ridgeway'.

At the Thomas Hughes Memorial Hall, Uffington, SN7 7RA

Entrants need to complete the Entry Form by **March 28th 2025**.

Entrance fee: £5.00 per entry/exhibit.

Contact us: swireartsprize@gmail.com

Further information can be obtained from our [website](#).



THE FRIENDS OF THE
RIDGEWAY

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Image by Emma J Williams,
highly commended in the
2024 Wall Art prize.

This year's Swire Ridgeway Arts Prize

One way in which The Friends of the Ridgeway promotes interest in and appreciation of the Ridgeway National Trail is through its annual [Swire Ridgeway Arts Prize](#) and associated Exhibition.

The 9th Exhibition will be held on Saturday 26 and Sunday 27 April this year in Uffington village hall (the Thomas Hughes Memorial Hall), open to the public from 10 am until 5 pm on both days. There is plenty of parking space adjacent to the hall. **Entrance to the Exhibition is free.**

There were 113 artworks in the 2024 Exhibition, in four categories: wall art, photography, written and sculpture.

The theme for 2025 is *Colours and Hues of the Ridgeway*

Go [here](#) to find out how to submit your work to the competition

Scutchamer Knob

Dan Bashford

Archaeologist and Historic Ridgeway Project Officer

The big reveal

Scutchamer Knob, a [Scheduled Monument](#), originated as an Iron Age round barrow, probably originally for a single burial (inhumation), at ground level in the centre of the mound. It is situated alongside the Ridgeway on the Downs, on Cuckhamsley Hill, above the village of East Hendred, a few miles east of Wantage, Oxfordshire. The earliest references we have for the name Cuckhamsley come from 10th century charters and from the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle in 1006AD when it is called *Cwichelmeshlaew* or Cwichelm's Barrow, named after the King Cwichelm, an early king of Wessex who is believed to have been buried here in around 696AD. Originally round, it is now crescent-shaped after being mutilated in 1840.

Although the entrance to Scutchamer Knob is only a few metres from the Ridgeway, it is very easy to walk past it without noticing that it is there. This is in part because the Knob is covered in scrub. It is one of the Historic Ridgeway Project's objectives, funded by Historic England, to remove the scrub by continually cutting it back to a short grass sward to what it would look like if sheep grazed it.

Hayley Gray, the Historic Ridgeway Volunteer Coordinator has already organised visits by King Alfred's scout troop from Wantage and the local scout group, 1st Cuckhamsley (who are named after the mound) in autumn last year to cut back some of the vegetation, which the landowner kindly arranged to have taken away. On 18 December the next group of volunteers was the Vale Path Volunteers, the path maintenance team of Vale of White Horse Ramblers.



A couple of days before that, Hayley, Sophie Aziz, coordinator of the Ridgeway and Thames Trail National Trails Volunteers, represented by Martin and Roger on the day and Friends of the Ridgeway trustee Dave Cavanagh, had begun the task of filling depressions in the Ridgeway with crushed limestone. These were at the entrance to the Knob, in the parking area, and in between. The aim is to improve access to the Monument for everyone, all year-round.

The VPV returned to continue the brush clearance – on the south side and flanks of the mound – on 6 and 15 January. The VPV will return to finish the job in late March or early April.

An evolving monument

Although Scutchamer Knob is about 4 metres high, it used to be some 4 metres higher. It shrank in 1844 when a local landowner took away cart-loads of soil which he believed contained the remains of Anglo-Saxon warriors who died at the battle of Ashdown nearby in 871, believing that the ►

soil would be good for his rose beds. There had almost certainly been at least one inhumation within the Knob, that of King Cwichelm, dug into the side or top of the existing Iron Age mound. The nineteenth century despoilation of the Knob had uncovered a range of finds, augmented by others from a re-exavation in 1934. It was those, plus the complete absence of a particular type of pottery, that led to the conclusion that the mound was probably constructed between 300- and 200-years BCE (before the current era). The original inhumation at that time was probably followed by more in Anglo-Saxon times.

In the early medieval period, it became a

meeting point for the shire moot (or county parliament), for solving disputes, discussing the news of the day and disseminating the will of the king. The eventual ceasing of these meetings was not the end of Scutchamer Knob's useful life. The site continued to be a meeting place, fair and major market until 1620. The 1840 excavation revealed a large oak stake that is believed to be the remains of a beacon mentioned in 1738 but probably dating to the Elizabethan period as an armada beacon - the Knob's prominent location on the high chalk ridge would have been an ideal location for one of a series of beacon fires to be lit to spread news or warnings of important events.

A new interpretation board is currently being designed for the nearby car park on the Ridgeway, funded by the [North Wessex Downs National Landscape](#). It is planned to erect it by the end of March. Up to a dozen additional interpretation boards will be erected at other monuments. **The Friends of the Ridgeway** will donate up to £5,000 towards the costs of these boards.

Each board will link into other boards and to a digital "Story Map" to be funded by the North Wessex Downs National Landscape to tell the stories of the exceptional archaeological sites along the route.



Background

The Friends of the Ridgeway was set up with the principal objective of preserving for the benefit of the public all the natural aspects and features of the Ridgeway National Trail. It was soon realised, however, that this was too narrow an interpretation of the name 'ridgeway', with the result that the charity's objectives were expanded in 2009 to embrace all of the ancient ridgeway trackways along the chalk downs of southern England. An examination of a geological map of England reveals that these trackways closely follow a ridge of chalk which extends from Lyme Regis on the Dorset coast to The Wash in Norfolk. The Friends of the Ridgeway decided that the most effective way of fulfilling its expanded objective was to create a long-distance trail along the entire length of this chalk ridge. We have given this the name 'The Great Chalk Way', which of course has the Ridgeway National Trail as its central and best-known long-distance component path.



The Ridgeway National Trail (RNT)

Pub Walks

Duncan Strutt,

Friends of the Ridgeway Trustee Tim Lewis has produced maps and directions illustrating a series of pub walks on and around the Ridgeway. These are available [here](#) on our website as shown in the accompanying screenshot.

The files are .gpx files. In order to use the files, the maps should each be downloaded and then imported to a programme/app that supports .gpx files. Then open each file from within the programme/app. They have been checked using the .gpx-compatible apps OS Maps, Komoot and All Trails.

Filling-in the holes between the parking area and the entrance to Scutchamer Knob. Photos Dave Cavanagh

Top left downwards: assembling new wheelbarrows; blowing away leaves from the depressions; breaking up the surface; shovelling crushed limestone into the trailer.



Top right downwards: hauling the trailer to where the limestone is needed; barrowing and tipping the stone into the holes; compressing the stones.





The side of Scutchamer Knob seen from the Ridgeway, before (top) and after (bottom) the brush on this side was cleared by the Ramblers Vale Path Volunteers in December

Clearing brush from the Ridgeway side of Scutchamer Knob by the Ramblers Vale Path Volunteers in December. Plus (bottom left) a break for mince pies.



I'm an archaeologist. I'd be much more interested in you if you were dead.

Reaching the end of a job interview, the interviewer asked the young archaeologist, fresh out of university, 'and what starting salary were you looking for?'

Archaeologist : 'In the region of fifty thousand pounds, depending on the benefits package.'

Interviewer : 'Well, what would you say to a package of five weeks paid vacation, full medical and dental cover, retirement fund to fifty percent of salary and a company car leased every two years...say, a red Porsche?'

The young archaeologist sat up straight and said, 'Wow, are you kidding?'

Interviewer : 'Certainly, but you started it.'

Two archaeologists were walking across a field when they came across some tracks.

'Those are the tracks of an old hunter-gatherer stalking a deer', said the prehistory specialist.

'Look like chariot wheels to me', said the Roman expert.

They were then run over by a train.

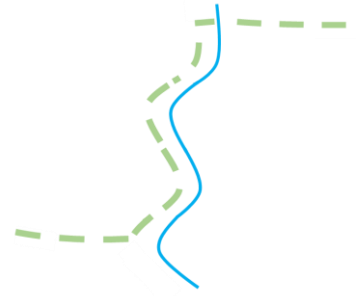
Archaeologists are always dusting off their old jokes.

How did the ancient Romans cut their hair?
With a pair of Caesars. [Enough, enough - Ed.]

Edward de Bono:

Humour is by far the most significant activity of the human brain.

If you never change your mind, why have one?



Mind the Gap



Otherwise, no problem. (On the road into Horton-in-Ribblesdale, Yorkshire Dales. Photo Dave Cavanagh)



On the fells above Horton-in-Ribblesdale. Photo Dave Cavanagh



If you use Facebook and don't already follow 'The Friends of the Ridgeway', why not give it a try? It's a great way to keep up in real time with things that are happening on the Ridgeway, as reported by our publicity officer, Wendy Tobitt.



The Friends of The Ridgeway

1.2K likes • 1.6K followers



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Wendy Tobitt reports that over 1,600 people follow The Friends of the Ridgeway on Facebook.

Posts about the Historic Ridgeway Project get high engagement and reach figures.

Lidar, which stands for Light Detection and Ranging, is a remote sensing method that uses light in the form of a pulsed laser to measure ranges (variable distances) to the Earth. A post on 29 December 'LiDAR Workshop for Mongewell Grim's Ditch' had a 21,792 reach and 793 engagement.

We had four posts in December and January about Cotswold Archaeology's survey of Mongewell Grim's Ditch. Highest of these was on 18 December with a 10,412 reach and 451 engagement. The most popular of our Facebook posts in 2024 was about the launch of The Great Chalk Way, just ahead of the Historic Ridgeway Project's workshop, and the Oxford Archaeology work at Uffington White Horse. Posts about Swire Ridgeway Arts Prize, and Anna Dillon's paintings are also popular.



For even more news follow the 'Ridgeway National Trail' Facebook page, with material posted by Mary Tebje on behalf of the Ridgeway Partnership, the body that manages, develops and promotes the Ridgeway.



Ridgeway National Trail

2.6K likes • 4.5K followers



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In the autumn issue of our [newsletter](#) FoR trustee Tim Lewis described how the Great Chalk Way (GCW) came about and was developed. The photo shows Tim, left, with Mark Annetts (Parks Officer for Salisbury Council) alongside the new GCW information board on the path beside the river Avon between Crane Bridge and the Kings Head pub in Salisbury – one end of the Sarsen Way.

Eight information boards are being placed at the ends of each of the component trails between Lyme Regis and Holme-next-the-Sea.

Ramblers press for an Access to Nature bill at a reception in the House of Lords

An opportunity for the Ridgeway

The Ramblers hosted a reception in the House of Lords on 16 December to celebrate the 75th anniversary of the Royal Assent for the National Parks & Access to the Countryside (1949) Act. You may have noticed BBC News items on that day. It was also an opportunity for the Ramblers to promote their case for a new Access to Nature bill, to tackle the barriers preventing people from getting outdoors. It might be possible to nudge into such a bill a clause to redesignate 'byways open to all traffic' as restricted byways. Then, in one fell swoop, all of the Ridgeway would be closed to recreational vehicles all year round. Repairs to rutted surfaces would then have a long life, unlike now when recreational vehicles can quickly destroy the surface again. In this way the experience of walkers, runners, cyclists, horse-riders, carriage drivers and mobility scooter users would be greatly improved along hundreds of byways throughout England and Wales. This would surely encourage more people to venture safely and further 'into nature', very much in keeping with the heart of Ramblers proposed bill.

Baroness Young (speaking) and Baroness Hayman at the reception in the House of Lords hosted by the Ramblers for improved access to nature. Photo Bob Merry.

Bob Merry, footpath maintenance team leader of Thame and Wheatley Ramblers, counts himself fortunate to be one of three volunteers from across the nation to be invited by the Ramblers to share with the House of Lords audience their perspectives on why paths, walking and access to nature were important to them. Bob describes the occasion.

“After a welcome introductory mulled wine to launch the general chit-chat, the reception got formally underway with speeches from sponsors Baroness Barbara Young of Old Scone (previous roles include chair of English Nature and Chief Executive of the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds) and Baroness Sue Hayman of Ullock (Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State at the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, whose responsibilities include access, including rights of way and coastal paths), followed by the Chief Executive of Ramblers, Ross Maloney, who outlined the case for improved access, and then introduced the three volunteers.”

“I talked about achievements made by volunteers to make footpaths safer and more accessible as well as the experiences of my twin daughters accessing the countryside with their electric wheelchairs. I made suggestions on how standards for footpath surfacing could be improved,” he said.



Great Chalk Way information board at Overton Hill

On a cold, misty day in mid-January, Friends of the Ridgeway (FoR) trustee Tim Lewis was with a team installing a Great Chalk Way information board at Overton Hill, the western end of the Ridgeway and the northern end of the adjacent Sarsen Way. Tim has personally paid for three of the information boards. In attendance were several staff of the National Trust: three Rangers

Izzy, Joe and Rob, who did the installation; Andrew probing the ground with a Cable Avoidance Tool; and Peter Oliver of the National Trust to assess the location in situ and give the go-ahead. Lastly was archaeologist Jim Gunter, himself a former trustee of FoR, whose task it was to sift through the soil from the post holes to look for anything of archaeological interest – nothing was found.



Photos by Tim Lewis except for the last one, by Jim Gunter



The Great Chalk Way

Tim Lewis (left) with the National Trust Rangers and the newly installed GCW information board.

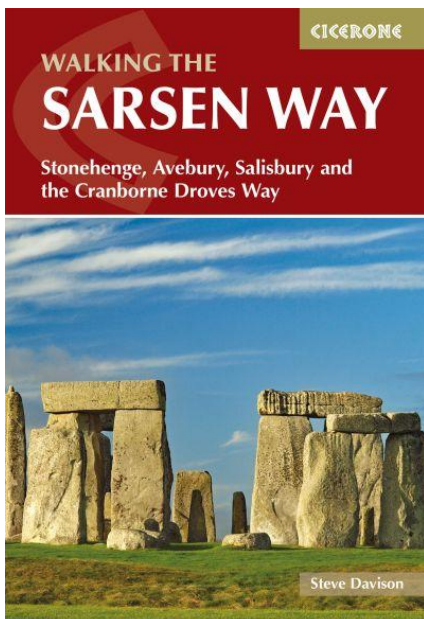


Win a guide to the Sarsen Way and Cranborne Doves Way

Friends of the Ridgeway trustee Tim Lewis, who has done so much to develop the Sarsen Way (from Overton Hill to Salisbury), is giving away a copy of the Cicerone guide to the Sarsen Way signed by its author, Steve Davison. The book also includes directions for and comments on the Cranborne Doves Way, from Salisbury to Win Green. To stand a chance of winning this book you must answer this question: where can you see a giant bustard making a bid for freedom on the Sarsen Way? As a hint, it is between Enford and Upavon. So, if you would like to have it, go and explore that section of the Sarsen Way. Send your answer to Tim Lewis timwhlewis@gmail.com

The winner will be chosen at random from correct entries.

The competition closes on 1st May 2025.



Near the end of November, the Vale of White Horse (VOWH) was shrouded all day long with mist hugging the lower levels. The top photo (by Jan Knight) shows VOWH Ramblers on a walk from Abingdon. On the same day I walked up from Ashbury (lower photo) to the Ridgeway, above which the skies were brightly lit.

Mapping field boundaries along the Ridgeway

Wendy Tobitt

60 volunteers have started work on the latest element of the Historic Ridgeway Project (HRW), to map Field Boundaries in a central section of the Ridgeway National Trail using LiDAR-generated imagery.

This work, led by Dan Bashford from the HRW with Rebecca Bennett, an experienced consultant using remote sensing in the historic environment, has been funded by a Farming in the Protected Landscape grant from the North Wessex Downs National Landscape.

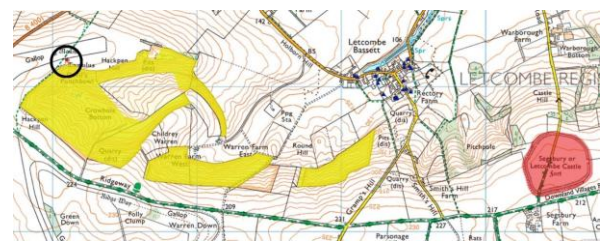
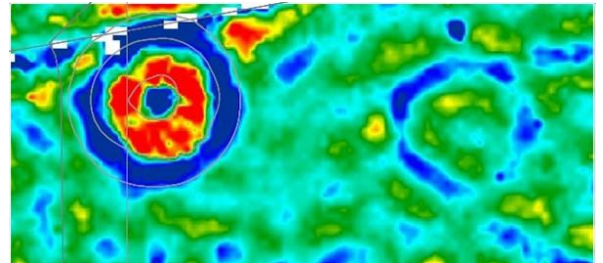
The volunteers, who completed their online training in January, are now working on imagery produced by remote sensing to gain a better understanding of the historic landscapes on both sides of the Ridgeway between Nuffield in the Chilterns and Bishopstone, west of Wayland's Smithy. The area covered is limited to around 500 metres each side of the Ridgeway.

Data produced by the volunteers will be reviewed and passed to Historic Environment Record officers in Oxfordshire and West Berkshire councils.

What is LiDAR?

LiDAR stands for Light Detection and Ranging. It is a remote sensing method that uses a pulsed laser to map structures on the land surface. Think of it as radar but pointing at the ground, not up in the air. With respect to the Historic Ridgeway Project, LiDAR can be used to discern and quantify the height of structures such as barrows, 'hollow ways' (tracks), pits and Iron-Age 'forts'. LiDAR can detect such structures even when they are covered by vegetation.

More than 170 people registered to take part in this project. The 60 volunteers working currently include people doing this work for the first time, and others with experience of a similar project in the Cranborne Chase National Landscape.



Top, LiDAR image of a tumulus and immediate surroundings on the north-west side of the Devil's Punchbowl, near the village of Letcombe Bassett (bottom).

Later this year there will be more opportunities for volunteers to take part in training and LiDAR work, including Field Work. To register your interest, please email: Daniel.Bashford@oxfordshire.gov.uk

Apart from this Friends of the Ridgeway newsletter, you can keep abreast of what's happening on the Ridgeway by [signing-up](#) for the quarterly Ridgeway Newsletter produced by the Ridgeway Partnership.



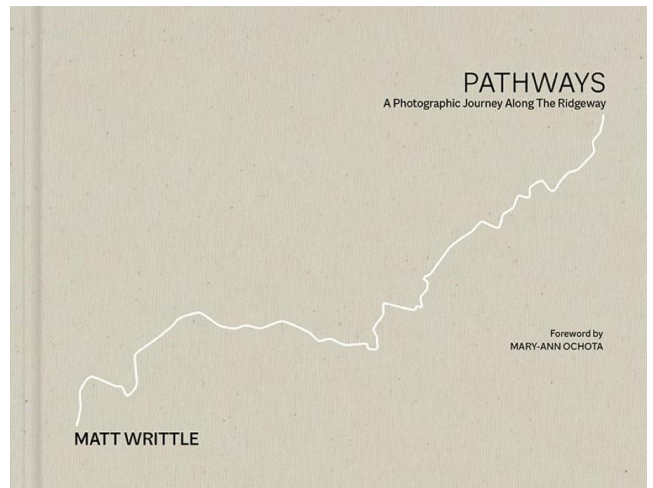
I was walking back to the Ridgeway along a restricted byway that would ultimately pass Odstone Barn, on the Downs above Ashbury in the far west of the Vale of White Horse. I spotted some red berries and assumed that they were the fruits of the hawthorn. Closer inspection revealed that

they were on a spindle tree, *Euonymus europaeus*. There were half a dozen specimens in one small area. I had not previously seen so many close to one another. As you would imagine the wood of this species was used to make spindles for spinning wool, its wood being hard, dense, and easily split.



Atmospheric views – walking up to the Ridgeway from Bishopstone in November. This was before Storm Bert paid us a visit. Photos John Gordon.

Pathways – A Photographic Journey Along The Ridgeway




This is the title of Matt Writtle's [book](#), a collection of 25 black-and-white photographs taken along the Ridgeway.

Matt's Ridgeway 50 Photos project is funded by the Arts Council of England. Last month Matt [reported](#) that his book had received an Honourable Mention in the Book category of the Tokyo International Foto Awards 2024.

The other 25 of the Ridgeway 50 photos will be produced by children, mostly during 2025. They will be doing this through Sharp Shots Photo Club, with guidance from Matt. The 50 photos will be displayed on frames that will be installed, by the Ridgeway and Thames Path Volunteers, along the Ridgeway during this year. The Friends of the Ridgeway are financially supporting this aspect of the project.

Some of the children's work will be displayed during the [Swire Ridgeway Arts Prize Exhibition](#), (Uffington, Oxfordshire) on 26 and 27 April.

 Sharp Shots Photo Club is at Lardon Chase, the Holies and Lough Down. 11 October 2024 · Streatley · 📍

We had a great day on Monday, kicking off our Ridgeway 50 photos workshops, along the Ridgeway trail at Goring. We spent the morning up on Lardon Chase, teaching the participants how to take creative landscape photographs of the amazing views. We then headed down to the Moulsoford Ferry landing at South Stoke, to photograph the historic point in black and white, using Matt Writtle's amazing photograph as inspiration. Whilst having lunch, the participants were able to enjoy looking at all of Matt's amazing photos for our Ridgeway 50 photos project. For more information about this amazing project with [Ridgeway National Trail](#) and Matt Writtle funded by the [Arts Council England](#) please click the link bio. [#r50photos](#)



OK, just one more: in a thousand years, archaeologists will dig up tanning beds and think that we fried people as punishment. Olivia Wilde.