

Friends of the Ridgeway



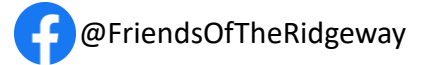
May 2026





May 2026

www.ridgewayfriends.org.uk



Welcome

Editor Dave Cavanagh
davecavanagh1000@gmail.com



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

The 10th Swire Ridgeway Arts Prize and Exhibition was a great success. Held over the weekend of 18 and 19 April, there were 121 artworks on display, and a little over 300 members of the public came to see them in Uffington village hall.

As usual, prizes were awarded for the winners of four categories of art: written, sculpture, photography and wall art. In addition, for the first time, there was an award for the People's Choice, chosen from all four categories by those who attended the exhibition.

The winner of the Written category – also chosen by the independent panel of judges as the overall winner – was Katherine Smith (pictured, with FoR Chair Mike Lewington), for her poem and prose '21st Celebration; a Winter Solstice'.

You can read Katherine's piece on [this page](#) on our website.

You'll also find all the other artworks on our [website](#)

Enjoy.

FoR has a new President, Matthew Barber. Read about him and his views on the Ridgeway on page 12.



Photo Dave Cavanagh

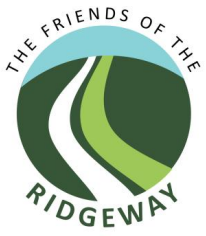
Cover photo. Visitors at the Swire Ridgeway Arts Prize Exhibition, Uffington, in April. Photo Dave Cavanagh





The exhibition, in Uffington village hall





Karen Vogt with *Circling Kites*.
Photo Wendy Tobitt ▶

the other winners

Sophie Matthew's mum, Gill Butler, receiving Sophie's prize
from FoR Chair Mike Lewington, for *Winter sunrise by White
Horse Hill*.

Photo Dave Cavanagh ▼



▲ Emma Coleman Jones with *Brightwell Barrow*
from *Castle Hill - Impending Storm*.
Photo Anna Dillon



◀ The People's Choice, Amanda Bates,
receiving her prize from FoR Trustee
Nathan Boyd for *Barrow Stone (Lambourn)*.
Photo Christopher P White



Winner of the Sculpture category
Circling Kites
by Karen Vogt



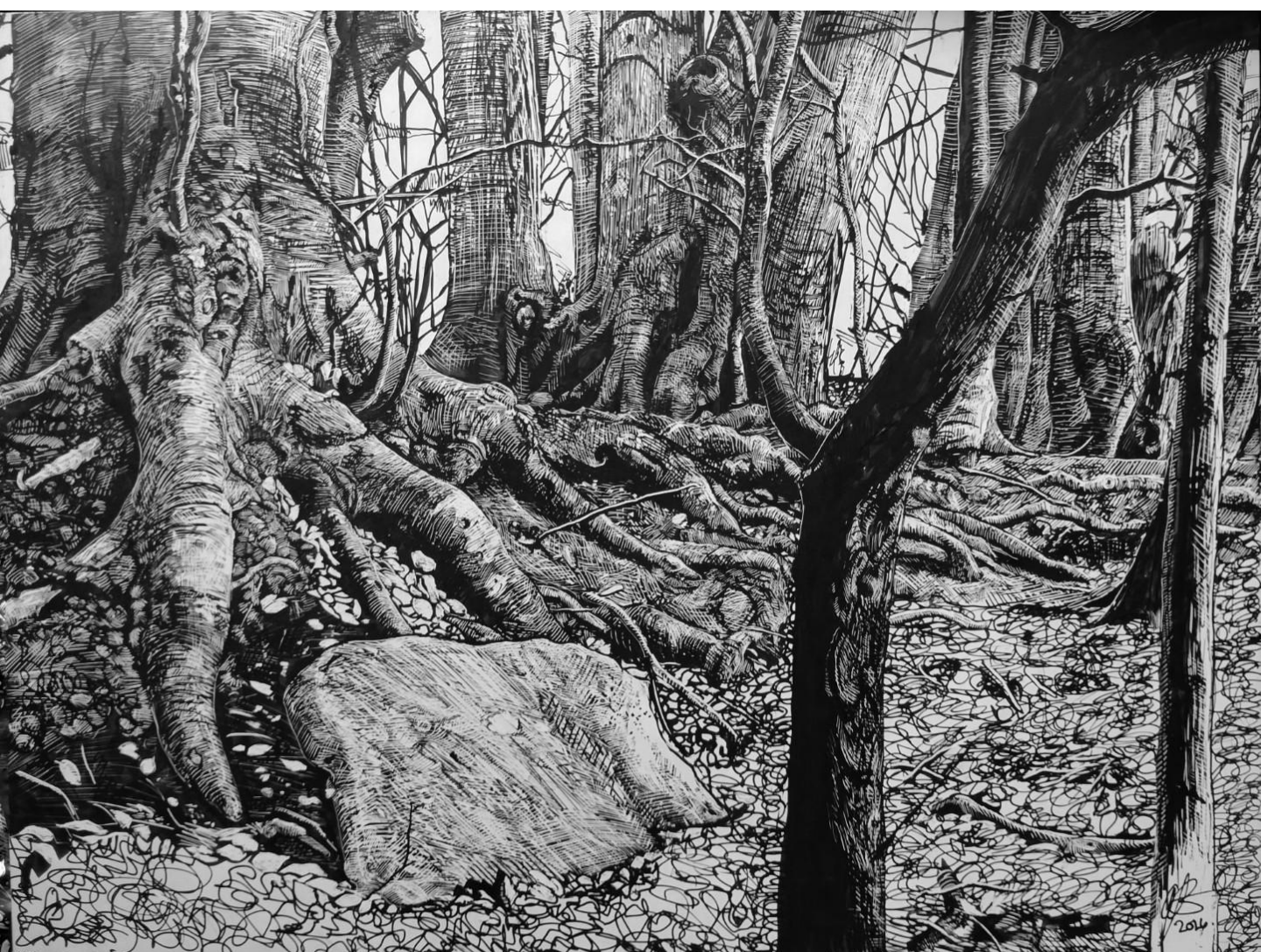


Winner of the Photography category
Winter Sunrise – by White Horse Hill
by Sophie Matthew.



Winner of the Wall Art category
Brightwell Barrow from Castle Hill – Impending Storm
by Emma Coleman Jones





People's Choice winner
Barrow Stone (Lambourn)
by Amanda Bates

Matthew Barber has accepted our invitation to be President of the Friends of the Ridgeway (FoR). Matthew, who is the Thames Valley Police and Crime Commissioner, has spent most of his life in Oxfordshire and lives just a few miles from the Ridgeway.



As he says “The Ridgeway is not just another place to walk, wonderful though that is. The 87 miles of the Ridgeway is part of our living heritage. For over 5,000 years people have used this trail for commerce, for warfare and as an intrinsic part of the community. Today it remains a working part of the countryside, essential for those who farm the land around it. The Friends of the Ridgeway seeks to preserve this vital part of our heritage for recreation, education and to support those who are guardians of this wonderful landscape.”

This reflects the view of the Ridgeway National Trail Partnership as well as of FoR that whilst the Ridgeway Trail itself is our paramount concern, the adjacent environs - the Ridgeway Corridor - are also of importance, intrinsic to the Trail.

This concept is enshrined in the five themes of the Partnership: Natural, Ancient, Sporting, Creative and Living. The latter includes the landowners and farmers who are the custodians of the land within the Corridor, and other businesses e.g. in the hospitality industry.

Matthew continues “I love discovering the history of the Trail, and there is always more to learn. It is a privilege to become President of the Friends of the Ridgeway and I look forward to working with this amazing team of volunteers to help champion the Ridgeway as one of England’s most important National Trails.”

As our President, Matthew will be our ambassador, and our public face on campaign and environmental issues where they impact on the Ridgeway.

What are Friends of the Ridgeway FoR?

This was the title of the latest talk in the Historic Ridgeway Lecture series, given by me, Dave Cavanagh, a Trustee of the Friends.

FoR was formed to campaign for the prohibiting of recreational vehicles from the whole length of the Ridgeway, all year round. I show some of the photos taken by Friends in the 1990s and early 2000s, revealing the quagmires that existed along much of the Ridgeway, caused by non-essential vehicles. Press cuttings collected by FoR illustrate the many years of campaigning which resulted in major gains in the noughties, both at local government and Westminster levels. There remain some loose ends.

I also describe how FoR has branched out since then, contributing to the actions taken by the Ridgeway Partnership to enhance people's enjoyment of our National Trail, by presenting the Swire Ridgeway Arts Prize, and championing the Great Chalk Way.

You can see my talk on the Ridgeway National Trail's YouTube page
<https://www.youtube.com/@ridgewaynationaltrail>





The Ridgeway National Trail

@ridgewaynationaltrail · 298 subscribers · 31 videos

Official YouTube account for The Ridgeway National Trail, UK - an 87 mile signposted o
nationaltrail.co.uk/ridgeway

Subscribed

Home Videos Shorts Playlists

There are many other talks in the Historic Ridgeway Lecture series, available via YouTube.

For you



The Friends of the Ridgeway: what is it For?



Farming on the Hendred Estate in Oxfordshire - staying solvent.



Hidden history along the Ridgeway National Trail.



Managing Earthworks, Buried and Structural Scheduled...



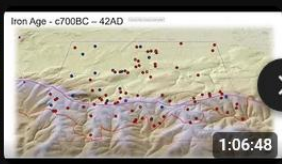
Living with the White Horse excavations at three hillfort...



Managing Earthworks, Buried and Structural Scheduled...



Ridgeway Airscapes and other Landscapes



A cup of tea with that slice of landscape?



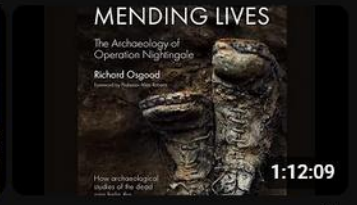
The Toponymic Landscape of the Ridgeway: Signs from th...



The Work of the National Trust in West Oxfordshire...



"Tis vitty!" The key role of volunteers in conserving...



Broken Pots Mending Lives: the archaeology of Op...

You'll also find videos of other interesting aspects of the Ridgeway National Trail.

Created playlists



50th Anniversary 2023
View full playlist



Ridgeway 50 Photos
View full playlist



#RidgewaySpotter
View full playlist



Cycling The Ridgeway
View full playlist



Top tips and top facts for visiting The Ridgeway
View full playlist

A photographer and the group of people he was photographing were attacked and devoured by a mob of hungry mice when he tried to get everyone to smile for the picture.

I used to do fine arts, until I decided I didn't like the arts. Now I'm doing just fine.

How well did Jackson Pollock do in art class?
He passed it with flying colours.

Why is it hard to talk to an abstract painter?
They never go into detail.

When I'm older and can afford it, I want to commission an artist to make a bust of me. But that's getting a head of myself.

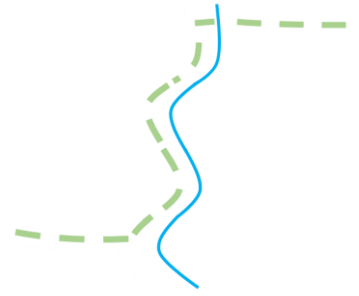
I made a ceramic sculpture of Mohammed Ali but it exploded in the kiln. It was gaseous clay.

I went out on a date with Simile. I don't know what I metaphor.

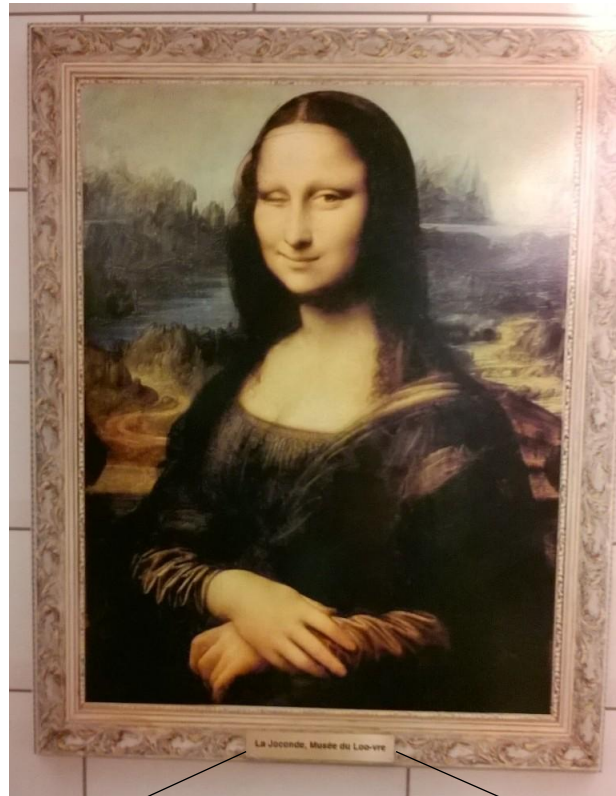
One man was sitting under a tree reading a book. The other man was writing in a notebook. The lion quickly pounced on the man reading the book and devoured him. Even the king of the jungle knows that readers digest and writers cramp.

Beautiful picture! What kind of camera did you use?

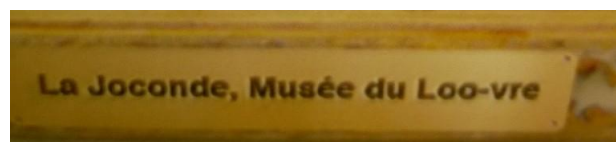
Irritated photographer:
What kind of paintbrush did Picasso use?



Mind the Gap



Seen in a loo on the Eurostar. Photos Dave Cavanagh



In case you didn't get it the first time: A photographer and the group of people he was photographing were attacked and devoured by a mob of hungry mice when he tried to get everyone to smile for the picture.

What a difference a law makes

Dave Cavanagh

The surface of the Ridgeway has seen a wonderful improvement, starting 20 years ago. What caused the change?

In the 1980s, 90s and early 2000s, parts of the Ridgeway were turned into quagmires by recreational vehicles - 4x4s and motor bikes. This ended in 2006 when the whole of the Ridgeway in Oxfordshire, and the westerly few miles of it in West Berkshire, were prohibited to non-essential vehicles, all year round, by the passage of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act (2006) (NERCA).

Members of the Friends of the Ridgeway took photos of the horrible condition of the Ridgeway in the 1990s and early noughties. These photos are part of FoR's archive. In March I retraced the steps of these members along a three-mile section of the Ridgeway from Scutchamer Knob (in Oxfordshire; about 2 miles west of the A34) heading eastwards into West Berkshire, under the A34 and as far as Several Down. I identified the spots where photos had been taken and took my own photos. These reveal the dramatic change for the good brought about by NERCA. To their credit, 4x4 and motorcycle users obeyed the law, allowing the surface of the Ridgeway to recover.

Over the next few issues of this newsletter, I'll compare pre-NERCA with post-NERCA photos to illustrate what has been achieved: the verges of the Ridgeway have reverted to being covered in healthy vegetation, whilst the Trail itself is largely green, thanks to re-growth of grasses.

West Berkshire Council has recently resurfaced several hundred metres of the Ridgeway along the section just east of the A34, under which the Ridgeway goes. This section is a restricted byway, consequently it cannot be used by non-essential motor vehicles. The new surface is wonderful. The Council would not have contemplated doing this were it not for the protection afforded by NERCA (2006).

The newly resurfaced stretch of the Ridgeway.



Detail of the new surface. Photos Dave Cavanagh



About 200 metres east of the eastern end of the newly resurfaced stretch is one of the sections that was photographed by a FoR member in May 1998. You can see what a terrible mess it had become. Contrast that with my photo taken in March of this year, at approximately the same position.

Why weren't recreational vehicles prohibited along the whole of the Ridgeway?

You can read about that [here](#), in our summer 2022 newsletter.



May 1998 ▲

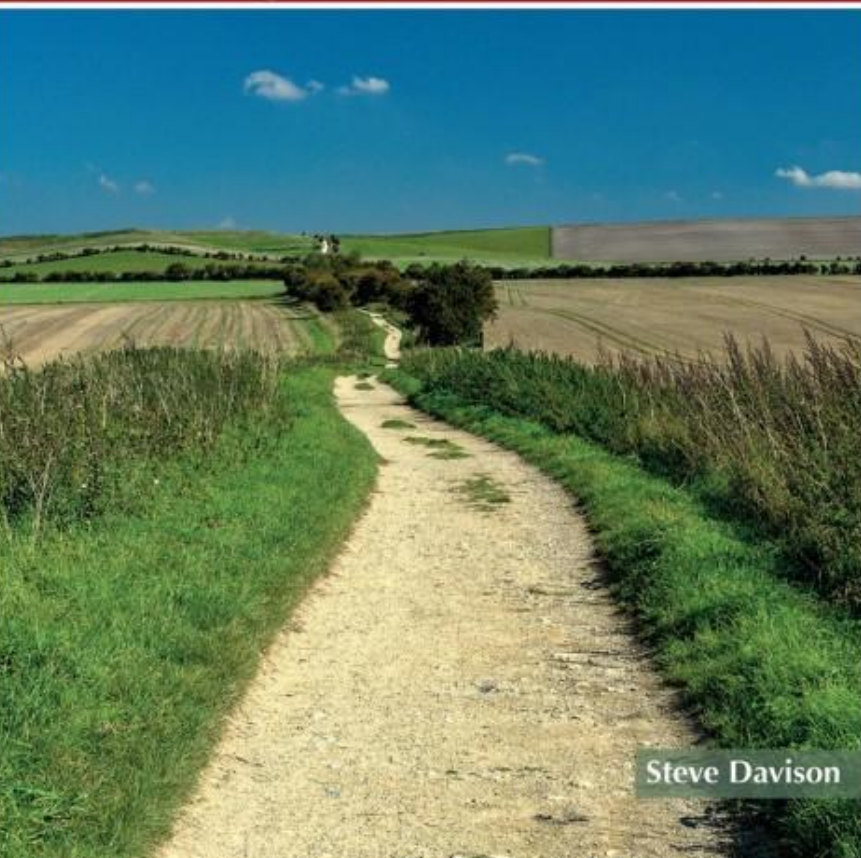
March 2026 ▼



CICERONE

WALKING THE RIDGEWAY

NATIONAL TRAIL Avebury to Ivinghoe
Beacon described in both directions



Steve Davison

A new edition of 'Walking the Ridgeway', by Steve Davison, published by Cicerone, will be available from the end of May.

Steve Davison writes:

Although the Ridgeway is a fairly short trail, it packs a lot of interest as it takes you on a journey through a landscape steeped in history, following old trackways that have been used for over 5000 years. The trail – which forms part of the Great Chalk Way that stretches between the coasts of Dorset and Norfolk – passes through two National Landscapes – the open chalky hills of the North Wessex Downs and the more wooded scenery of the Chilterns, with a peaceful section alongside the River Thames in the middle.

Members of the Friends of the Ridgeway can have a 15%* discount on the cover price when buying directly from Cicerone. Indeed, this discount applies on all guidebooks and eBooks on the Cicerone website. *20% of ordered before 24 May.

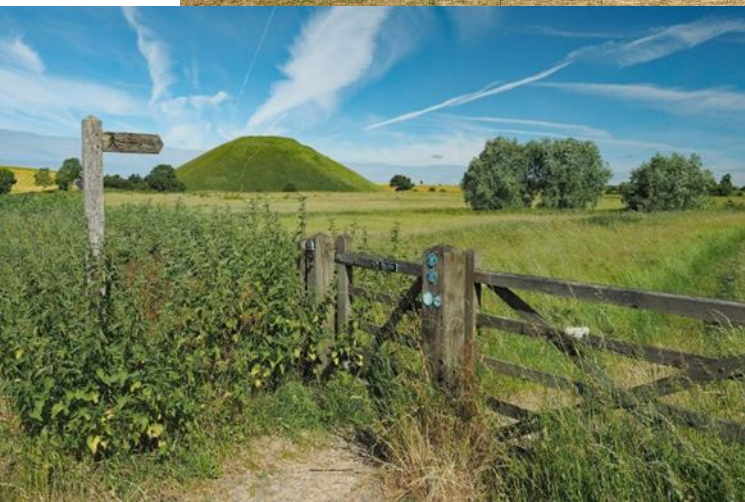
For me, it is the numerous prehistoric sites that lie along the western section, that leave a lasting impression. The earthworks of several Iron Age hillforts, that lie close to the trail, offer commanding views, then there is the atmospheric Wayland's Smithy Neolithic long barrow named after a magical smith in Norse mythology.



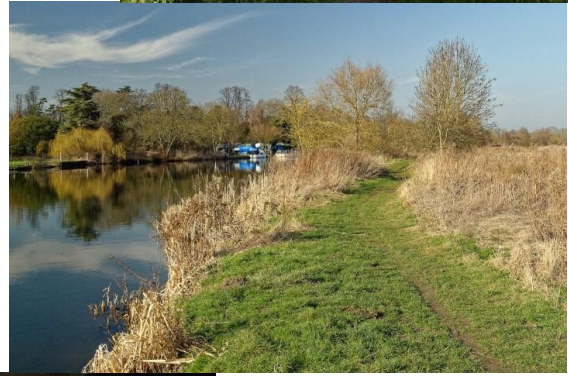
Nearby is the wonderful Uffington White Horse striding out across the convoluted downs. We may know with a fair degree of accuracy that the figure was carved some 3000 years ago, but as for its purpose, we'll most likely never really know.



Before starting your journey along the Ridgeway at Overton Hill – or at the end, if you started at Ivinghoe Beacon – Avebury is always worth a visit. Highlights include the impressive Neolithic henge and stone circle, the West Kennet stone avenue, the West Kennet long barrow and Silbury Hill.



After meeting up with the River Thames – and the Thames Path – the eastern section of the Ridgeway weaves its way past numerous beech woods – a celebrated feature of the Chilterns – offering a vivid contrast to the open landscape of the North Wessex Downs. Here, in early summer, the woods display a carpet of blue as a mass of bluebells come into flower, while later in the year, cooler nights herald a dazzling array of autumn colour. Along the way there are several great viewpoints such as Whiteleaf Hill, Coombe Hill and Ivinghoe Beacon; the latter offering a great panoramic view and a fitting end to the Ridgeway.



But there is much more to the Ridgeway – if you have the time. There are picturesque towns and villages, ‘chocolate-box’ thatched cottages and cosy pubs, historic churches and interesting museums, all waiting to be discovered and easily accessible from the trail. Favourite detours include the Aldworth Giants, nine larger-than-life effigies of the de la Beche family hiding in an ancient church, and Nuffield House – former home of William Morris, the man behind the Morris motor company.

In the populated South there are bound to be one or two low points and they come in the form of the M4 and M40 motorways that cross the trail. But these are just fleeting moments along an otherwise great trail.

The Ridgeway has been here for thousands of years, so why not take your time and enjoy the journey? Explore the surrounding area; sit a while and soak up the views; or listen to the 'whispers' as the breeze gently rustles the leaves and imagine the people that have travelled before you along 'Britain's oldest road'.



Steve Davison

Steve has written and illustrated a number of walking books including Walking the Sarsen Way, Walking in the North Wessex Downs and Walking in the Chilterns; to find out more, visit:

www.stevedavison.co.uk

Rambling is the Elixir of Life



Photo Peter Flaxman

“We now know that the normal biological process of ageing is not a cause of major problems until the later 90s.”

So says Sir Muir Gray, who is Director of the Oxford Optimal Ageing Programme which contributes to the NHS Living Longer Better [Programme](#). The problems in one’s 60s, 70s, and 80s, he argues, “come from loss of fitness, caused by decades of sitting, disease, caused by the physical and social environment and by social factors notably deprivation and ageism, the negative and wrong beliefs about ageing.”

Notwithstanding this complexity, Muir is convinced that we can all improve our fitness by walking (hence the title of this piece ‘Rambling is the elixir of life’), especially spells of brisk walking.



To help motivate us all, Muir has collaborated with the NHS to produce the Active 10 app, which you can get from your usual source of apps.

It is really easy to use. Just switch it on (at least once every five days) and put it in a pocket. It will record your total time walking and highlight the number of those minutes that count as brisk.

Professor Gray



Professor Sir J A Muir Gray, CBE, FRCPSGlas, FCLIP is the President of Oxfordshire Ramblers.

Find out how to live longer, better, with the Ramblers, and view Muir's video, [here](#).

To watch his talk, go to the Oxfordshire Ramblers [homepage](#) then click on the link below Muir’s photo.

Celebrating the 30th anniversary of the Thames Path (TP) National Trail

Robert Seatter's 30 superb poems about the River Thames will be published on QR codes between Kemble and Woolwich

A beautiful mural of wildlife painted by Vickie Amiralis will be on Mill Meadows Pavilion in Henley-on-Thames

Various activities have been arranged. There will be a Relay of walks along the TP, starting from the Source on 5 June and finishing at Woolwich on 28 June. The TP Relay is a collaboration with Mayors for Drinkable Thames, part of the Drinkable Rivers campaign for healthy rivers. Details of the Relay are available here

https://www.nationaltrail.co.uk/en_GB/trails/thames-path/thames-path-30th-anniversary/

They will also be in the next TP magazine, also available from the TP website from mid-May.

There are further events with poetry, art and photography.

You can enter the Thames Lens competition with your best photos of the Thames Path in London. The winners will be able to be seen in the Totally Thames Festival on the Bazalgette Embankment



Wildlife photographer Jon Mason will be visiting 30 nature reserves along the Thames Path

The source of the River Thames.
Photo John Tippetts

If you intend to visit Wayland's Smithy, the Uffington White Horse or walk along the Ridgeway more generally in that vicinity, you might consider a visit to Uffington Museum. In addition to the permanent exhibits of aspects of the history of the village there is a new exhibition *Myths, Monuments and Memory*.

MYTHS, MONUMENTS & MEMORY

UFFINGTON MUSEUM, SN7 7RA

Our 2026 exhibition explores the myths and legends woven into the Uffington White Horse landscape, from Saint George and the Dragon to the story of Weland the Smith. It highlights how this landscape and its monuments have carried significance from prehistory to the present day.

Discover how reuse in the landscape has conveyed meaning over the centuries, how beliefs have endured, and how personal, family and community events continue to enrich this story.

Open 2-5pm every Saturday, Sunday and Bank Holiday

Monday from Easter to end of October



As part of this exhibition, we are collecting community memories of local legends and personal stories connected with the Uffington White Horse landscape.

Share your story through our online form or by contacting us at uffingtonmuseum@gmail.com



St Mary's, Uffington

If you visit on a Sunday the you might also consider visiting St. Mary's Church in Uffington. Former Poet Laureate John Betjeman (who lived in Uffington for a decade or so) called it the *Cathedral of the Vale*. Starting on Sunday 7 June until the last Sunday in September there will be tea and cakes in the church, from 2:30 to 5:00.



Friends of Uffington Museum

2026 TALKS

Thomas Hughes Memorial Hall, Uffington SN7 7SE
Mondays 7:30pm

2nd February Uncovering Oxfordshire's Dinosaur Highway

9th March Black Wantage

6th April Coleshill - Nerve Centre of British Resistance

4th May Myths, Monuments, and Memory

8th June Oxfordshire on the Home Front 1914 - 18

6th July Oxfordshire's Highwaymen

3rd August Coffee and Coffee Houses in Oxford

7th September The Mercurial Mitfords! The Uffington Connection

12th October The Landscape Detective

9th November TBA



The best place to park is in the car park alongside the village hall (Thomas Hughes Memorial Hall).