

Winter Newsletter, January 2021



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From the Chairman

Dear Friends

This time last year, in writing for the Winter Newsletter, I said that with *"the Christmas and New Year festivities behind us, winter is fully established. As I write it is very cold and frosty but bright clear sunshine; the snowdrops are in flower under the willow tree – I should be up on the Ridgeway rather than sitting at my desk."*

As everyone does at this time of year, the Trustees have also been thinking about our New Year's resolutions and goals for the Friends of the Ridgeway and, of course, the trail itself. Musing on change with regard to our beloved Ridgeway leads to not entirely happy thoughts amongst the exciting possibilities".

But of course, the year turned out to be very different from that envisaged. The COVID-19 pandemic happened.

And issues facing the trail changed – visits to the countryside increased with significant increases in visitors to the ridgeway. Much of this was to be welcomed, given the many health and wellbeing benefits provided to people through outdoor exercise and contact with nature. This increased number of visitors emphasised the importance of the trail to those who live along its route; it is a vital resource which we must protect for future generations and the inevitable issues they will face.

There were, however, a number of incidences have occurred of undesirable actions and activities taking place, including damage to property and the environment. Perhaps many of these incidents came about as the result of a lack of understanding of how to engage positively with the natural environment, rather than by deliberate acts of damage. But many were deliberate illegal use of motor vehicles along the trail



as well as inconsiderate use.

Now that we have more time to reflect over the winter period, Natural England is seeking views on how they can refresh the Countryside Code. They plan to update the short version of the Code, aimed at visitors to the countryside. And also plan to produce two versions of the full Code – one aimed at visitors to the countryside, and one aimed at landowners and land managers.



The new Code must be relevant to as wide an audience as possible and particularly for children, young people and those parts of our communities that don't access the countryside as often – such as those from low income areas, urban areas, ethnic minority backgrounds, younger people and people with long term health conditions. To help, you can contribute to the questionnaire at https://defragroup.eu.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_9sosQ0YInPyfv3T

The present short COVID-19 Code says:

- Consider the local community and other people enjoying the outdoors;
- Park carefully so access to gateways and driveways are clear;
- Leave gates and property as you find them;
- Follow paths but give way to others where it's narrow;
- Leave no trace of your visit, take all your litter home;
- Don't have BBQs or fires;
- Keep dogs under effective control;
- Dog poo - bag it and bin it;
- Plan ahead, check what facilities are open, be prepared;
- Follow advice and local signs and obey social distancing measures.

If all visitors to the countryside followed these simple guidelines, many if not all of the issues that occur on the trail would simply not happen. Everyone would be able to benefit from and enjoy the countryside.

Two particular issues due to COVID-19 that have been identified by the Ridgeway Trail Officer are parking and pinch points. Several parking areas along The Ridgeway remain open but most are small. Whilst some car parks were closed for a period in the first lockdown, all are now open but can get congested; it is not unusual to see cars parked on verges and the like, in some cases causing obstructions to others. Much of The Ridgeway has wide open stretches across the Downs between Avebury and Streatley-on-Thames but there are pinch points in the Chilterns. Locations where social distancing may not be possible have been posted on the interactive map on the Ridgeway National Trail's website.

In the last Newsletter, I reported on a variety of issues affecting the trail; it is disappointing to report that many of the same issues remain to be resolved with the addition of other reported matters. In at least one case we have held off taking action as the relevant officials have other priorities due to COVID-19 but as soon as appropriate we will pursue.

There have been continuing reports of illegal use of motor vehicles on the trail by 4X4s and trail bikes; incidents have increased over this winter perhaps in part due to the general increased usage of the Ridgeway. Where evidence exists the incidents have been reported to the Thames Valley Police who are coordinating the reports and taking appropriate action. Unfortunately where there is no evidence to support statements, we cannot take any action. If you become aware of improper use of The Ridgeway please not only report the matter but obtain evidence, ideally photographs showing number plates and the like, so that we can take action.

One of the problems we face is staying up-to-date with current and on-going issues. We have over 500 members whom we believe can help us, providing 'eyes and ears' on the Ridgeway. This last year saw increased use of the Ridgeway and increased reporting of anti-social and illegal activity. It would be great to have a number of volunteers who could 'adopt' a section of the Ridgeway that they regularly walk/cycle/horse-ride, with the intention of being informal wardens. The wardens could report:

- damage to trails and infrastructure;
- minor anti-social behaviour such as littering which could be easily cleared; and
- illegal use of the Ridgeway by 4x4s and trail bikers etc.

At this stage we are exploring whether this might be a workable idea so anyone interested in supporting such a scheme should contact us.

Funding for The Ridgeway continues to be an issue. The pandemic restrictions have made access to the countryside more important for health and well being leading to increased visitor numbers which itself inevitably leads to more surface damage on the trail and hence increased repair and maintenance costs. The situation is exacerbated by events on the Ridgeway having to be cancelled meaning few event donations. It is possible that we shall have to take the lead in a fund raising campaign for resurfacing costs.

Updating of our web site continues, albeit slowly. The underlying software and structure has been updated along with the format of the pages. Our new logo is incorporated. Work is now going ahead to update and edit the content. Please do visit our web site at <https://ridgewayfriends.org.uk/> and let us know what you think. Equally Facebook and Twitter remain important modes of communication with a slow increase in numbers of people reached and engagements. We would be pleased to hear from anyone willing to volunteer to manage these social media pages for us. If you do feel able to volunteer to help run and administer the organisation please get in touch. Don't hesitate, just email, telephone or write to me and I'll be delighted to hear from you.

Due to family issues, I shall not stand for re-election as Chairman at the AGM. It has been an honour to have served as your Chairman and, I hope, played a part in ensuring the ridgeway is protected for future generations.

With all best wishes
Anthony Burdall



Secretary's Minute Book

Since the last Newsletter was issued in October, the executive committee have met once in December 2020. Again the meeting was held online. The trustees were joined by Ricky Cunningham, our webmaster, and Sarah Wright, Ridgeway Officer of the Ridgeway Partnership that manages and promotes The Ridgeway National Trail.

We have subscribed to Zoom so that we can have meetings without a 45-minute curfew hanging over us. Apart from quarterly meetings of the committee we can use Zoom for other purposes, including this year's AGM, for preparing for the Swire Arts Prize, which will also be held online, and for interviewing prospective trustees.

At the moment we have five Trustees following the tragic death of Andy Greehalgh and resignation of Dianne Godfrey, out of a maximum complement allowed by our Constitution of eight. It was agreed that we should seek to fill the vacant posts, where possible bringing in volunteers who would extend the interests and expertise within the committee. A search for new trustees is all the more pressing as Anthony said that he would retire at the 2021 AGM, for family reasons. Anthony will approach Reach Volunteering to search for a new chair of the Friends. Hence, we would welcome volunteers to join us as Trustees. Please do get in touch if you are willing and able to help. We have used our Facebook page to seek other trustees. Since the meeting it is heartening to report that some volunteers to join the committee have come forward.

There was much discussion on illegal use of motor vehicles on The Ridgeway. Sarah noted that our Facebook page had been very useful in getting members of the public to comment on motor vehicles on the Ridgeway. She was liaising with Thames Valley police on this matter, with a view to issuing a press release and producing a leaflet explaining about the restrictions on motor vehicles on the Ridgeway.

With regard to social media, which is a way to reach like-minded people beyond the membership of the Friends, Anthony suggested that we seek a volunteer to manage our Facebook page and Twitter account, including to post more material on a regular basis and to engage more widely. Sarah Wright advised that we focus on Facebook in the first instance, and that we might seek some young professionals who would be eager to help us in this period of diminished opportunities for them, for mutual benefit.

Sarah reported on the activities of the Ridgeway Partnership. Although COVID-19 had caused difficulties, volunteers had been able to work on the National Trail some of the time. She confirmed that the financial support of the Friends of the Ridgeway towards the cost of volunteer activities would indeed most likely be spent this financial year. Although the number of events on the Ridgeway had been negatively impacted by COVID-19, some had taken place in November and December.

Sarah told us that three donors had sponsored the Donate a Gate scheme. The Ridgeway Partnership hoped to install one gate at each of Sparsholt Firs and Schutchamer (Vale of White Horse stretch of The Ridgeway, above Wantage) in December, with the third one later, in the Chilterns. The Partnership would like to instal three gates along The Ridgeway each year. Sarah wondered if a Friends member might wish to donate for a bench; if you would like to donate please do get in touch.



Last year's Ridgeway Friends Day and AGM had to be cancelled. It does not seem possible that COVID-19 restrictions will be lifted sufficiently to allow a physical art exhibition and AGM. Hence, the AGM will be on Sunday 25 April 2021 but this year will have to be an online meeting. However, rather than the email discussion of last year it will be a Zoom meeting with the usual reports from your committee. Details will be circulated nearer the time.

Dave Cavanagh
Secretary

Treasurer's Update

Since the beginning of the financial (calendar) year, the main items of income and expense have been:

Income	£
Subscriptions	1,606
Donations	950
Gift Aid reclaimed	485
Closure of Vale of White Horse group	229
Bank interest	140
Total	3,410
Expenditure	
Grant re Ridgeway maintenance volunteer team	3,500
Redesign and hosting of web site	1,314
Production and mailing of the annual report	646
CDW waymarks	448
Insurance	345
IT support	282
Purchase of Zoom licence	144
	6,679

As a result, the funds at our disposal at the end of December 2020 were:

	£
Unrestricted funds	23,021
Ridgeway National Trail	16,178
Swire Ridgeway Arts Prize	14,997
Great Chalk Way	3,746
Total	57,942



The net outflow of funds in 2020 was £4,108. These figures will be reflected in the 2020 Annual Report. The grant for the Ridgeway maintenance volunteer team was taken from the Ridgeway National Trail fund, and the cost of the CDW waymarks was deducted from the Great Chalk Way fund. Some additional fundraising will be needed to meet the cost of the Great Chalk Way information boards.

Tim Lewis
Treasurer and Membership Secretary

The Swire Ridgeway Arts Prize

It was a huge regret to have to cancel the Swire Ridgeway Arts Prize in 2020. It is very dispiriting to spend time cancelling, deleting, destroying things into which one had put so much effort – and the Swire Ridgeway Arts Prize



was perhaps the most dispiriting. For 2021, we are delighted to announce that there will be an arts prize and associated exhibition. The hope was that if at all possible it would be a physical exhibition in late April but if that is not possible it would be an online exhibition; judges have indicated that judging can be done on line. Given present and possible future coronavirus restrictions, it seems improbable that a physical exhibition will be safe and sensible and hence the decision has been made that it will be an online exhibition and prize giving.

Anthony Burdall

Great Chalk Way

Progress in finalising and waymarking the route of the section of the Great Chalk Way from the southern end of the Ridgeway National Trail to Win Green via Salisbury, which we have called the Sarsen Way and which includes the Cranborne Doves Way (CDW) between Salisbury and Win Green, has been greatly slowed by the onset of COVID-19. However it is hoped to be able to waymark the Cranborne Doves Way in both directions in January 2021, and to finalise detailed directions for it, again in both directions.

The mapping of the route has also been updated, and can be viewed on the Great Chalk Way website, at <http://greatchalkway.org.uk/>, which itself has also been redesigned. Work still needs to be done, especially on the routes for cyclists and equestrians, but much progress has been made.

The route of the Pewsey Avon Trail, which forms a major part of the Sarsen Way, has been submitted to, and accepted by, the Ordnance Survey for inclusion as a long distance trail when the relevant map is updated (although it is not known when this might happen).

Tim Lewis

Ridgeway Partnership news

News from the Ridgeway Partnership can be seen at https://www.nationaltrail.co.uk/en_GB/trails/the-ridgeway/news/

Much of the recent stories have inevitably concerned use of the trail during the COVID-19 pandemic. This winter, all are welcome to visit The Ridgeway but everyone should note that they have a responsibility to follow the government's COVID-19 guidance, to follow the Countryside Code and to be considerate towards others visiting, working or living around the Trail.

But illegal use of motor vehicles has featured. On 7 January 2021, Sarah Wright our Ridgeway Officer featured on BBC Radio 4 You and Yours talking about off-roading. You can listen to her interview on <https://www.bbc.co.uk/sounds/play/m000gy03> (Sarah starts at 23:52 if you don't want to listen to all of You and Yours).

Family adventures on the Trail

Enjoying time with family has become especially important this year during the COVID-19 pandemic.



Sarah, our Ridgeway Officer interviewed a family of four living in Buckinghamshire who chose to spend their 'quality family time' on The Ridgeway. *"It was an adventure and a journey"*, said Ian, looking back at the time he and his wife Zoe and their two sons Max and Tom had spent on the Trail. *"It caught our imaginations to think the route has been walked by so many different people before us, over thousands of years. Our boys could really relate to the history of the area after visiting*

Avebury stone circle and Wayland Smithy barrow”.

Completing all 87 miles of Trail was a major achievement for the family, especially for Max who is likely to be the youngest person to have completed the Trail in 2020. However, it wasn't just about the miles as Zoe explained, *“It was time and space to talk as a family, away from the distractions of iPads and Playstations. We also met interesting people on the Trail”*. Zoe's husband Ian added, *“Walking a long distance route is unique because it keeps a family busy for an entire day and you do it together. At home and on holiday, you tend to do separate activities.”*

For the two boys, Max aged 10 and Tom aged 13, the Trail was an experience they will remember and it impressed their friends at school too. Max remembers the first day when, exhausted after 13 miles starting from Avebury, he exclaimed to his parents he was not doing any more of The Ridgeway! The family had planned to continue the following day but rain and Max's reluctance meant it was best to return home and come back another time. For Tom, it was the food he enjoyed in the pubs along the Trail that made the experience special and motivated him. In Goring, at the Miller of Mansfield boasting two AA rosettes for its food, Tom's interest in food attracted the attention of staff and he was invited into the kitchen!

Reaching their final destination at Ivinghoe Beacon was memorable for both boys, with Tom describing it as a *‘steep last ascent but a nice way to finish, like summiting’*. Ian found it surprisingly significant for him, as he explained how having visited Ivinghoe many times before coming from home, the different approach along the ridge presented a new perspective to a familiar landmark. The family celebrated on the hilltop with champagne and Shloer that had been cleverly stashed ahead of time in the car parked nearby!

Choosing a long distance trail was a first for the family as their walking had previously entailed 5 or 6 miles a day. The idea, explained Ian, was that, *“The Ridgeway represented an inspiring challenge that could be broken down into manageable sections for weekend walking trips, relatively close to home. We scheduled our trips for bank holiday weekends which gave us two days of walking and one ‘rest day’ back at home”*. As it turned out, the family would tend to start walking around 10.30am following a drive from home, and cover about 10 miles a day. For other families contemplating The Ridgeway, Ian and Zoe have a few tips:

- Don't be too ambitious with the miles and be flexible. Allow half an hour or so for diversions off the Trail to look at things that catch your children's interest and time to chat over your packed lunch. Remember driving there and back takes time too, and sometimes staying overnight works best if it's a long drive.
- Food and a nice place to stay is a reward for everyone in the family so organising these aspects can make a real difference to how much you all enjoy the experience. There are family-friendly places along The Ridgeway.
- If the weather is bad, try to postpone or shorten your trip and go back later.

Having completed The Ridgeway, the family now have their sights set on the Cotswold Way, another National Trail. Ian reports they are benefitting from increased strength, confidence and experience from The Ridgeway, to the extent that they are now covering 10 miles before lunchtime! Tom has also been inspired to suggest he and his friends use The Ridgeway for their Duke of Edinburgh challenges and maybe, in the not too distant future, we might see him joining runners in the Ridgeway Challenge 86 event. As for Max, being the youngest to complete the Trail in 2020 is enough for the meantime!

Cyclists and horse riders have their say

18th December 2020

Thanks to 1,679 people who took part in our Ridgeway Riding Route online survey which was open for nearly a year and closed in October. We now have some great feedback and support to create a popular, high quality off-road route for cyclists and horse riders between Goring-on-Thames in Oxfordshire and Dunstable in Bedfordshire.

Just over 98% of respondents supported our proposal to cater for cyclists and horse riders as well as walkers in the Chilterns. This level of support to create a Ridgeway Riding Route through the Chilterns is a real strength because it will help us attract funding to create the route and ensure the route is well-used when it is launched.

A signposted off-road riding route will help address the difficulties and frustration that many people expressed about using The Ridgeway in the Chilterns currently. One person wrote '[It's] confusing as it constantly changes from footpath to bridleway' and another wrote 'As a regular cyclist user of the western part of the Ridgeway, I've always been put off heading east due to having to link rideable sections together'. Some made comparisons with opportunities elsewhere, such as 'I walked [The Ridgeway] 40 years ago, I cycled the South Downs Way this year and would love to do the same with The Ridgeway'.

Interesting findings include a growing interest in e-bikes and a high demand from horse riders for routes that avoid roads. Cyclists were also more likely than walkers to leave their car at home rather than drive to the Trail, flagging the opportunity to reduce visitor car use and carbon footprint by providing good cycle links between settlements and the Ridgeway Riding Route. A small proportion of 16% or 261 people wanted to see improved links between the Trail and public transport.

Local businesses around the area will have opportunities to attract Ridgeway Riding Route visitors, from providing refreshments to stabling to events. Hitching rails, stabling and parking for horse boxes were requested by most horse riders. Numerous people mentioned water taps/troughs as being welcome or even essential. The importance of well-maintained, user-appropriate surfaces was argued by many, and several people cautioned against creating a route with a formal or urban 'character'. Bike hire was of interest to 124 people and e-bike hire to 104.

Over 500 respondents showed an interest in organised horse riding events with entry fees over £5 and nearly 500 were interested in organised off-road cycling events costing over £5. There was also interest from nearly 300 people in guided bike rides costing up to £5.

There was an even spread in terms of people who need signage and those who feel confident using a map without signage. Feedback also pointed out the importance of signage to horse riders since it is 'difficult to consult a leaflet when on a horse, especially if it is a bit lively!' Just over half of respondents make use of GPS route downloads whilst 74% use Ordnance Survey maps. Several people mentioned that friends or family often show them good routes, suggesting guided rides and personal recommendations will be useful in spreading the word when the Ridgeway Riding Route initially opens.

Circular routes were popular with over 90% of respondents. The most popular routes were those which avoided roads/traffic, passed landmarks/viewpoints/beauty spots, passed refreshment stops and had 'great wildlife/nature' interest. More people (790) expressed an interest in routes which present a physical challenge (distance and/or terrain) than those who wanted to avoid steep climbs (206). However, 683 people wanted routes which were 'great for novice cyclists and horse riders' and 377 wanted routes 'great for families'. This feedback suggests we need to develop a set of circular routes which cater for a range of abilities and fitness.

A detailed report describing the survey findings will be made available in early 2021. Local businesses and donors interested in supporting the project and/or providing services to Ridgeway Riding Route visitors are asked to contact the Ridgeway Officer.



A Ridgeway Epic

When my wife asked what I would like for my birthday in 2015, I had an unconventional answer ready: *"Could you give me a lift to Avebury one morning?"* Pause. *"Quite early. And then pick me up from Tring in the evening?"*



Five of us who regularly ride off-road with Cycling UK Wantage had our sights on our longest ever one-day ride. The Ridgeway in a day. 87 miles and 2000 metres of climb, most of it cyclable off-road, albeit with a few diversions for footpath only sections. Transport for the start and finish were the final piece of the planning jigsaw.

So 7:00am on the 22nd August found two Davids, two Richards and one Robin in the small car park at the official start of The Ridgeway National Trail. My wife took some pictures, waved us off into the cool morning mist, and headed for home.



The first stretch climbed the downs above Avebury. Mist hung in the wide valley, sitting in the fields. The trail was rutted and still wet after rain the day before, so required full attention when moving. But when we paused, we could just make out some of the stones in the ancient circle. Mystical as well as misty!

Eight miles later, climbing the stiff grassy slope to Barbury Castle I noticed a lack of traction, followed by noticing a lack of air in my back tyre. Shouting to the others and stopping, I noticed a hissing noise from the front too. I swapped the tubes and realised that bringing my smaller mini pump in a weight saving effort had been a mistake. Then one of my back-up tubes failed to inflate, so I had to borrow from Richard A – usually the least prepared of the group, but in this case very well supplied with inner tubes.



Three miles later following Richard A down a rocky slope we noticed a lack of anyone behind. Retracing our steps we found David Y's bike upside down and him shoving in a rubber 'worm' to plug the hole in his tubeless tyres. Four punctures in eleven miles, and most of an hour behind our rough schedule – not a great way to start!

The next ten miles were thankfully eventless, though Richard A started lagging behind our preferred pace. Richard had already warned us about his 'extreme tapering' strategy, which

meant that he hadn't ridden a bike for any real distance for three months. We weren't in a huge rush – it would probably be fair to describe us as more 'ramblers on bikes' than as racers. But when you settle into a good pace it is frustrating to slow it down. As it was only a small lag, just before the climb up to Uffington Castle, Richard told us to go ahead and he'd catch us up at lunch (and place him an order!)

We continued, now on a roller-coaster section of big climbs and big descents, all on slightly damp chalk to give a bit of an edge to them. It became clear that our planned midway brunch was going to be lunch and I phoned ahead to warn the venue. Knowing that by mid-way we'd want a change from energy bars we'd decided to have a bit of a treat and go to Pierreponts Café in Goring. It's a lovely place, having been set up by top class chefs trading down from the stressful life of the London restaurant scene, and at 42 miles in, it was almost exactly halfway.

We arrived there about 1215 – an hour later than planned. After ordering (smoked salmon, avocado and poached egg on wholemeal toast – perfect!) I checked my phone. There was a message from Richard A: soon after parting ways he'd got a puncture and while well supplied with inner tubes he didn't have the right adaptor for his pump. At this point, he was near Wantage and quite close to home so he'd decided to call it a day.

I made one small mistake at this point: I got tempted by the pecan tart. Very nice it was, but it was very filling and sat in my tum for the next few hours meaning that I really wasn't interested in energy bars and had to take on all calories in the form of sports drink. The temperature was in the mid 20s by now, so drinking wasn't a chore.

The ten miles after lunch fairly flew by, being mostly flat and quite a lot on road. After that, just around Ewelme we started really feeling the effort. We stopped for a break and a snack at 52 miles, we stopped to lube our chains at 62 miles, and paused again at about 65 miles. This wasn't helping our average pace, but gradually the miles fell away. The landscape shifted from the open chalky hills of the Ridgeway in Oxfordshire to the more wooded hills of the Chilterns.

A particular killer of a hill came after Princes Risborough. We turned up a steepish narrow track and climbed for 50 metres, then there was a big root and a step up of almost a foot, with a possible way round on the left. When less tired we might have had a go at it, but by this point it was a signal to get off and push for a while. This was a common mode over the next several miles: push up a hill, then ride over the crest, snake through some woods, and down the other side. I have to say that David B embarrassed us here by actually riding up some of the steeper climbs. It was all hard work, but eventually we came down into Wendover in need of refreshments.

The trails after Wendover were more of the same: up and down. Our other Richard had planned on completing the ride and heading for the 18:34 train at Tring. It was now clear we'd be running pretty close just to catch the train. I could see a couple of route options on the map but we fortuitously found that a footpath on a farm track had been upgraded in status to Permissive Bridleway. It was flat at last, and our average speed increased. Entering Wigginton, Richard spotted the sign for Tring railway station and he was off on a mission.

The other three of us followed, catching him and benefitting from his haste at speeds we'd be happy with on a road bike, let alone knobbly tyres after 80 miles. We got to Tring with 6 minutes to spare and we waved goodbye to Richard, assuring him that this counted as a full traverse of the Ridgeway.

Three of us continued. Our route diverged from the footpath-only Ridgeway again and on a Bridleway. Unfortunately, after a mile it was blocked by a wire fence – the farmer disagreed with the Bridleway marked on the map and had taken matters into his or her own hands. This required a small detour and we were back on the road for a couple of miles. Then, finally, we approached Ivinghoe Beacon.

Ivinghoe Beacon, the official north and east end of the Ridgeway is a small steep hill – very steep from the side we approached. The easier way was from the other end, and although the sun was getting a bit low, we weren't going to be stopped on the final stretch. We rode a little and then pushed our bikes up the last part of the hill. This was it, we had made it – for each of us the longest off-road ride we'd ever done, having taken almost exactly 12 hours.

We admired the view – you could see for miles – and persuaded some walkers to take some pictures of us at the look out point. Then, inevitably, our thoughts shifted to the nearby pub. We found a steep chalky path down the hill, taken with a bit of care given our tiredness. Then it was a mile and a bit rolling down hill to Ivinghoe Aston and the Village Swan. Pints of ‘Proper Job’ seemed the most appropriate beer with which to toast our success. We also agreed on the choice of food – a ‘Dutch Satay’ involving big pieces of pork, smothered with peanut sauce and with chips on the side. Yum.

Why do we do this? Partly it is the physical challenge. But I really enjoy experiencing the scenery of the whole Ridgeway all in one session, from the rolling open hills in the west to the heavily wooded and steeper Chilterns – all linked by the band of chalk. I’ve walked The Ridgeway as well, with my wife, and that is certainly enjoyable in its own right, but because it happened over different days (in our case spread over a year) the ‘flow’ was less clear.

Since then, we’ve tried to ride the Ridgeway each year and have usually succeeded. Sometimes we have injected some variation into the route and the group changes from year to year too.

One year we tackled it in the opposite direction, based on the fact the wind was blowing the other way. This was good in that the big climbs were done while we were fresh in the morning, but we did this ride on an October day that winter arrived. About 4:00pm the skies darkened and freezing rain started to fall. An hour later David Y slowed down because his fingers were frozen and he couldn’t work his brakes or gears properly. We slowed almost to a crawl for the last 20 miles, but we still made it! This year of COVID-19, we couldn’t make the logistics work safely, so 2 of us made a circular 85-mile loop, including 25 miles of The Ridgeway instead.

Our route is an evolving improvisation from the National Trail to avoid sections that are not permitted for cycling. Mostly this uses other heritage trails such as the Icknield way and Swans Way, but from Streatley to Ivinghoe there are several sections where we had to take to a road, some quite busy or fast. The Ridgeway Partnership, Cycling UK and the British Horse Society are developing ‘Riders Route’ sections to avoid this problem and it would be great to have a fully traffic-free cycle route. But even today, after thousands of years, The Ridgeway is still giving joy to travellers of many types.

Robin Tucker



Facebook conversation



The number of people reached via our Facebook page continues to increase albeit slowly except with some posts which really seem to catch people's imagination. Our Twitter account is essentially dormant. We very much need to increase traffic on both platforms to get our message out and enlist support to protect the spirit of the Ridgeway.

The most people reached in recent Facebook posts was a total of 1,470 people for a post about motorcyclists seen on the Ridgeway between Uffington and Hackpen Hill; there were a variety of comments plus other reports to our web site about motorcyclists on the trail. Posts about illegal motor vehicle use on the trail attract significant attention.

Comments keep being received (and are very much welcomed) on our web site. Join the conversation. Please do let us have your comments. In particular, please report any issues relating to the trail where there is damage.

And if you feel you can help us improve our social media presence, please do get in touch – all help gratefully received.



The Friends of The Ridgeway

Published by Anthony Burdall · 27 November 2020 ·



Reports have been received on a group or groups of trail riders on scrambler bikes on the Ridgeway. They were seen between the Uffington White Horse and Hackpen Hill on Sunday 22 November 2020. Were you on that section of the trail last Sunday? Did you see any motorcyclists? If so, when did you see them and where were they? Do you have any photographs or video?

Please let us know if you saw any motorcyclists either by message on this page or on the comments page of our web site at <https://www.ridgewayfriends.org.uk/contact-us/>



1,470

People reached

281

Engagements

Boost Post