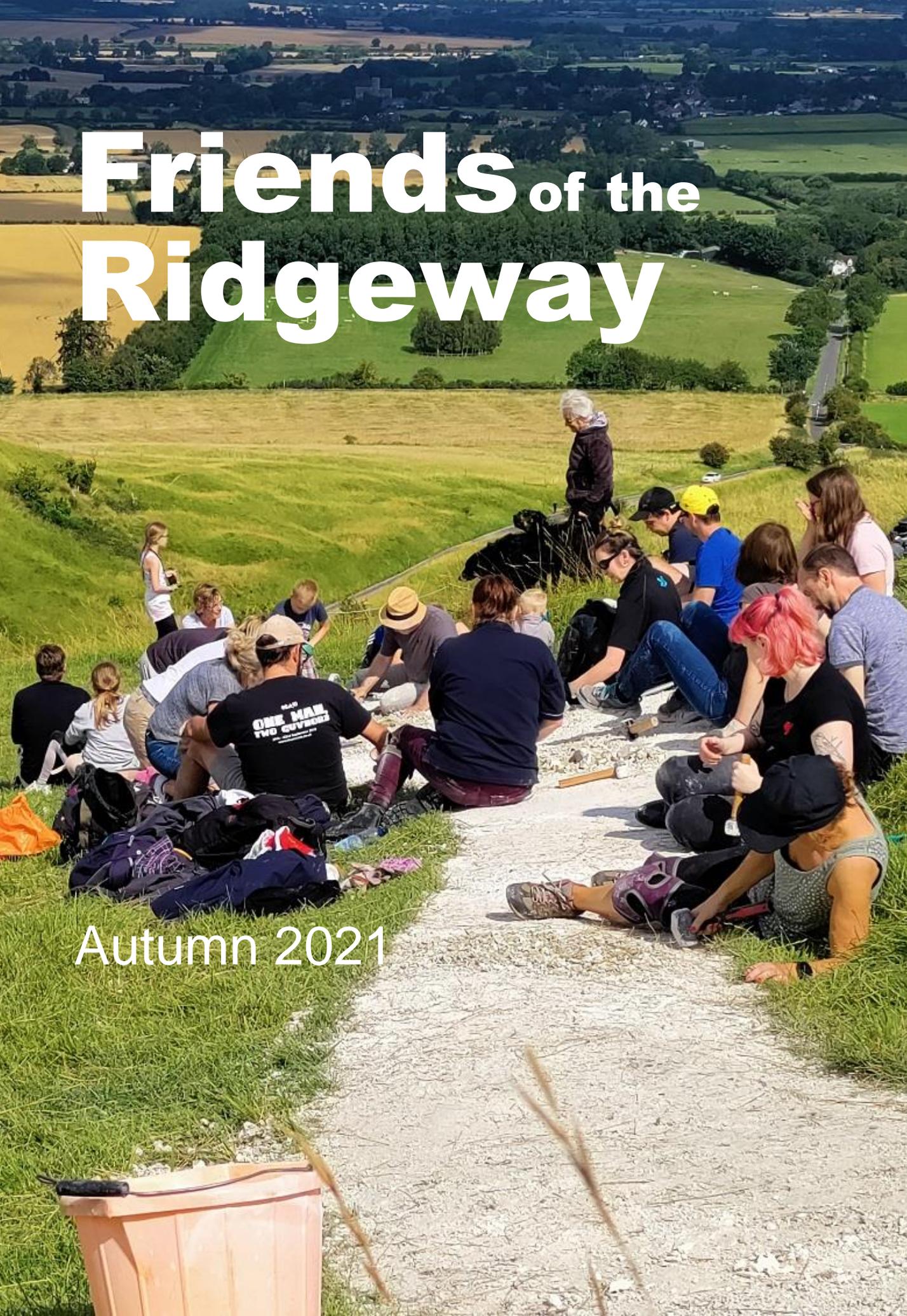


Friends of the Ridgeway

Autumn 2021





AUTUMN 2021

www.ridgewayfriends.org.uk



Editor Dave Cavanagh
davecavanagh1000@gmail.com



Articles were written by the editor unless credited otherwise.

If you have an idea for an article on some aspect, including your own experience, of the Ridgeway or its environs, or on another section of the Great Chalk Way, do discuss it with the editor davecavanagh1000@gmail.com

Got some great photos on the Ridgeway or nearby countryside, villages and events? Do share them with us: email them to the editor.

Cover: Chalking the Uffington White Horse, 2021. Photo: Dave Cavanagh.

Welcome

THERE IS GOOD news and bad news in this issue. The bad news is that White Horse Hill, over which the Ridgeway passes, is under threat of being developed as a static 'caravan' park. The Hill hosts many thousands of visitors each year, eager to breathe in the air and feast on the view of the Vale below, to see the Uffington White Horse, walk around the ramparts of Uffington Castle, up Dragon Hill, down into the Manger.

ON A HAPPIER note, the Uffington White Horse was the focus of attention in August when over 200 members of the public took to their knees, not in homage to the Horse but to beat it, though in a good way. Our chair, Mike Lewington, and I ate bangers and burgers on your behalf at the annual BBQ for the National Trail volunteers who maintain both the Ridgeway and the Thames Path.

ANTHONY BURDALL is once again organising the Swire Ridgeway Arts Prize. Next year's exhibition will return to Uffington village hall after being online only this year, although it will also be available online.

THE THEME in this issue of the newsletter is 'In the sky'. Several members sent in their photos and I've sourced additional ones from a Facebook site called Ridgeway and Ancient Tracks of Britain, which I recommend.

Dave Cavanagh

After a truck carrying 27,000lbs of deodorant explodes in the US, local weather stations say the area should remain dry for up to 48 hours.

ROBERT TWIGGER walked from Stonehenge to Lindisfarne, essentially along a line 1 degree 50 west – the Great North Line.

Ridge walking

In his book *Walking the Great North Line*, reflecting on when he was in Derbyshire, Twigger eulogised ridge walking.

RIDGE WALKING is a special satisfaction all of its own, akin to, but different from, contour walking. For the lazy or meditative, nothing beats hogging a contour, ideally one etched with a path that runs the full length of a line of hills. You want to be close enough to the top to get the views and the sense of grandeur, but not right on the top where it's windy and the going is up and down i.e. the definition of a ridge walk.

Yet a ridge walk has all its own satisfactions. A series of challenges that come into view. The feeling of true command of the valleys on both sides. Summits and cairns. Coming up to Mam Tor is like this, though there's a horrible dip down and a steep climb necessitated by the winding pass.

But larks! All along the ridge, I can hear larks on either side rising and singing, invisible ...

This route along the ridge is truly ancient. I meet my first foreign walker, she is far too friendly and polite to be English. Or rather, to be an English walker. English walkers are never lost, even when they are. They hate asking directions except obliquely – as if tendering a view, an opinion. This Polish woman was lost and quite happy about it. She wanted to get to Edale and I told her about the sign a way back. I hope she found it. Even if she didn't, she'd be happy to ask another walker.

Walking the Great North Line (2020), Weidenfeld and Nicolson, pp 183-184.

Why does it take only five minutes to walk to the pub but 25 to walk back? The difference is staggering.

Cloud drifting over the east side of White Horse Hill. Photo: Dave Cavanagh





The east side of White Horse Hill, with the Ridgeway along the skyline, as seen from Uffington village. If static homes or other caravan pitches were built on the camping fields here, which are on the hillside, they would be seen for miles around. The Uffington White Horse and Castle are to the right of the view shown. Photo: Dave Cavanagh

Threat to White Horse Hill, Uffington

Dave Cavanagh

THERE IS a distinct possibility that White Horse Hill, over which the Ridgeway passes and home of the iconic Uffington White Horse and more besides, will be despoiled with all-year-round camping, where the proposed ‘camping’ could include static caravans and other permanent pitches located in fields visible from miles around, including from the upper slopes of White Horse Hill and the nearby Dragon Hill. As you can imagine there is widespread alarm at this prospect amongst organisations such as the National Trust, CPRE and North Wessex

Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (NWD ANOB). Indeed, some of the camping fields are actually within the NWD AONB.

The area of concern is Britchcombe Farm, situated on the steep lower northern slopes of White Horse Hill in Uffington parish, overlooking the Vale of White Horse. For many years this farm was family-owned, with low key, low impact, seasonal camping, mostly involving tents on grass surfaces. Recently the farm was purchased by a company that provides “holiday homes and luxury lodges” on sites in several counties.

continued ...

The Giant’s Steps and the Manger below them, on the west side of White Horse Hill. Photo: Dave Cavanagh



Threat to White Horse Hill, continued

THE COMPANY has not yet submitted planning applications for specific developments but in preliminary applications to the local district council it mentions the siting of permanent static caravans on new bases together with bases adjacent to the caravans for cars and the creation of internal access roads. General utilities such as water and electricity supplies would also be installed for each pitch.

We believe that it would be entirely inappropriate to destroy the beauty and

tranquility of White Horse Hill in this way. White Horse Hill is not only within the NWD AONB but it is also a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). The Hill is home to the Uffington White Horse (late Bronze Age or early Iron Age) and the Iron Age Uffington Castle. It has long and round barrows, and beautiful geological features that include Dragon Hill and the Giant's Steps. There are public rights of way on the Hill though, in any case, much of the land, excluding Britchcombe Farm, is open access, under the care of the National Trust.

SEVERAL MEMBERS of Friends of the Ridgeway are actively engaged with the other organisations and individuals that are against the potential developments on White Horse Hill. You can be assured that collectively we are following developments very keenly and will act when appropriate.



This photo was taken from the footpath going up the north side of White Horse Hill, with Dragon Hill on the left. The developers have highlighted the bright green field to the left of the wood as one of the ones that they are interested in.

THE IMAGE THEME for the next issue of the newsletter is

‘the beginning and the end’. The obvious subject matter is sunrise and sunset though you may, of course, interpret the theme differently. Do send me your photos. They can be taken whilst on or near or looking at the Ridgeway or be elsewhere in the Ridgeway corridor – roughly the area between the Ridgeway and nearby villages and towns on either side. If you are an artist, feel free to send photos of your work that correspond to this theme.

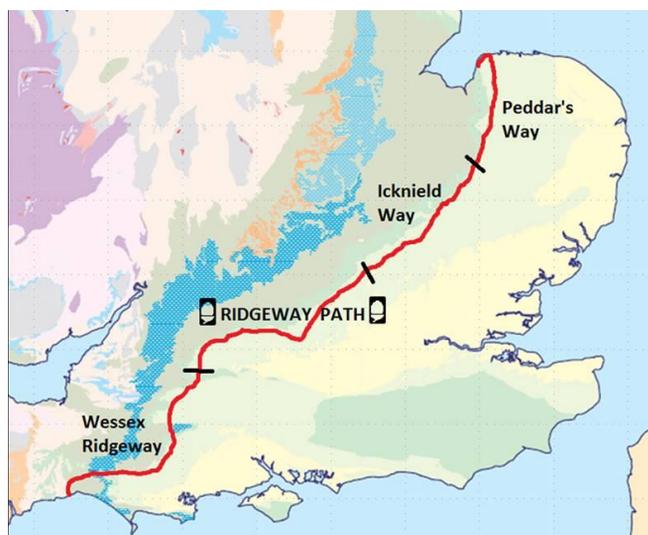
davecavanagh1000@gmail.com



At Overton barrows. Photo: Stuart Royle.

NOT A MEMBER of Friends of the Ridgeway? Perhaps this copy has been sent to you by a friend or you have got it from our website? The annual subscription is only £8. You can join easily by clicking on the link on our home page www.ridgewayfriends.org.uk

WE ARE A REGISTERED CHARITY, set up in 1982, led by volunteers to preserve and maintain the special nature of the Ridgeway National Trail and to encourage the public to use it: thinking on it; sitting on it; observing the surroundings of it; observing the ancient monuments along it; sketching, painting, photographing, writing on it; walking, running, cycling on it; riding horses or driving carriages on it, flying kites on it – the list goes on. We raise funds for maintenance of the Trail by the Ridgeway Partnership, the body responsible for it. We are also a champion and developer of the Great Chalk Way, a coast-to-coast path from Lyme Regis in Dorset to Hunstanton in north Norfolk, of which the Ridgeway National Trail is a part. You can find out much more on our website.



Line of the Great Chalk Way

Swire Ridgeway Arts Prize and Ridgeway Friends Day 2022

Anthony Burdall

THE FRIENDS OF THE RIDGEWAY are delighted to announce that the Swire Ridgeway Arts Prize will be held next year in April 2022. There will be both an exhibition in Thomas Hughes Memorial Hall, Uffington and an associated online exhibition. A flyer for the competition and the competition Rules and Entry Form are on our website www.ridgewayfriends.org.uk

The aim of the competition is to bring the Ridgeway to life, not only as a long distance trail but as an artistic inspiration, and to show the Ridgeway, its history and environs, in all their aspects throughout all seasons. In this context 'Ridgeway' refers to the full length of the ancient tracks running along the chalk down land from Dorset to Norfolk (the Great Chalk Way) and not just the Ridgeway National Trail.



The theme of the competition is 'Spirit of the Ridgeway'.

There will be separate classes for

- wall art (including painting, drawing, etching, textile pictures and wall hangings, and mosaics),
- sculpture (including ceramics),
- photography (including digital art), and
- writing (poetry or prose).

FOR 2022 there will be an exhibition in the Thomas Hughes Memorial Hall, Uffington (Broad Street, Uffington, Oxfordshire, SN7 7RA), located in the centre of the beautiful and historic rural village of Uffington in the Vale of White Horse, with an associated online exhibition. The exhibition will be open to the public on Saturday 2 April and Sunday 3 April 2022 with an associated online exhibition. The Ridgeway Friends Day will be on Sunday 3 April 2022 which will include our AGM as well as the arts prize giving.



Celebratory BBQ

National Trails volunteers receive their Queens Award

As Oscar Wilde might have said ‘To have one National Trail may be regarded as good fortune, to have two looks like richness.’

MANY OF YOU are lucky enough to live in counties through which both the Ridgeway (87 miles) and the Thames Path (184 miles) wind their way. The combined length of these two National Trails is 271 miles: they take some looking after. Whilst some of the maintenance work is done by various highway authorities – by their own staff or contractors – much is done by volunteers, and has been for decades.

THE TEAM is led by National Trails Volunteer Project Coordinator Lucy Duerdoth. Last year the team were awarded a prestigious Queens Award for Voluntary Service. Unfortunately Covid prevented the award being formally presented. This was rectified at the volunteers’ Summer BBQ in September. The award was presented by the Vice Lord-Lieutenant for Oxfordshire, Brian Buchan, who opened his remarks by noting that the dress code was “informal”, though he was in full dress uniform. “Despite appearances,” he said, “I am in my work clothes.”



Vice Lord-Lieutenant for Oxfordshire, Brian Buchan



Some of the core members of the RW and TP volunteer team, with chair of the TP Partnership, Steve Good, on the left.



Michael Cooke receiving the award. Photo: Malcolm Hissey.

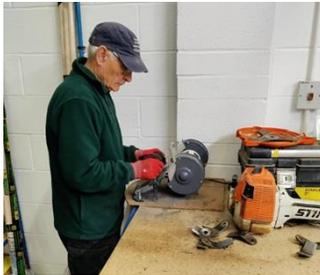
The building in the background houses the workshops, kit and vehicles.



THE ANNUAL BBQ event is by way of saying thank you to the volunteers for all their efforts not just on the Trails (installing gates and waymark posts as well as clearing vegetation) but also on maintaining machines (including mowers, brush cutters, chain saws, hedge cutters) in the workshop shared with the OCC Countryside Access Delivery Team in Sutton, between Eynsham and Stanton Harcourt, West Oxfordshire.



For chair Mike Lewington (blue shirt) and I attended the BBQ as guests. The only heavy lifting that we did was knives and forks of the culinary variety.



Far left, two of the mowers that are the work horses of the Trail volunteers. The one in the foreground is a flail model. Left above, re-sharpening the flail cutters, one set of which is shown on below left.



Where the deeds are done

TO GIVE you an idea of where the Ridgeway Trail and Thames Path volunteers work, here are the locations in the July and August task diary sent out by Lucy Duerdoth, National Trails Volunteer Project Coordinator.



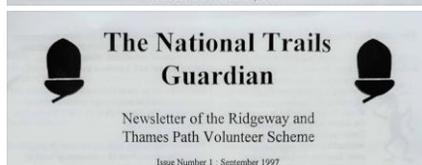
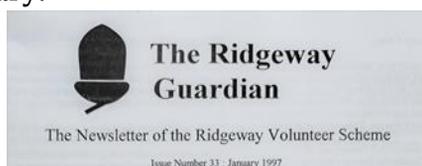
Princes Risborough (Buckinghamshire)
Hackpen Hill (Wiltshire)
South Stoke, North Stoke & Mongewell Park (Oxfordshire)
Grimm's ditch (Oxfordshire)
Snap, Shipley Bottom & Liddington Castle (Wiltshire)
Ashbury to Idstone (Oxfordshire)
Ashbury towards Uffington Hill (Oxfordshire)
Watlington - Britwell Hill (Oxfordshire)
Wantage Monument (Oxfordshire)

Marlow Temple Lock to Bondig bank (Buckinghamshire)
Upper Inglesham and Lechalde (St Johns Lock) (Swindon Borough)
Chimney Meadows (Tadpole bridge end) (Oxfordshire)
Chimney Meadows (Shifford Lock end) (Oxfordshire)
Shiplake (Oxfordshire)
Grafton to Radcot bridge & Kelmscott Manor Farm (Oxfordshire)
Sonning (Wokingham)
Castle Eaton (Swindon Borough)
Clifton Hampden, Days Lock & possibly Dorchester (Oxfordshire)
Oxford City - Osney Mead & Kings Lock (Oxfordshire)
Rose Revived & Newbridge Farm (nr Longworth) (Oxfordshire)
Goring (West Berkshire)
Eynsham Lock (Oxfordshire)



Workshop tasks (Sutton, between Stanton Harcourt and Eynsham) - once in each month

THE FOR ARCHIVES show that until 1997 the Ridgeway and Thames Path each had their own volunteer scheme. Then the teams combined to form the Ridgeway and Thames Path Volunteer Scheme, with a joint periodic newsletter or task diary.



Two men went to mow. On the Ridgeway by the Wantage Monument, at the end of August. Photo: Lucy Duerdoth.



'Alignment', West Kennet Avenue. Photo: Jon Lipinsk.

WESSEX AIRSCAPES

ANNA DILLON | 3-24 SEPTEMBER 2021 | OPEN DAILY | SEWELL CENTRE GALLERY | HEDLEY THORNE

In September artist Anna Dillon (who, amongst other things, designed our logo) and landscape photographer Hedley Thorne exhibited their works at the Sewell Centre Gallery in Radley College, Abingdon.



Hedley Thorne



You can see examples of their work at

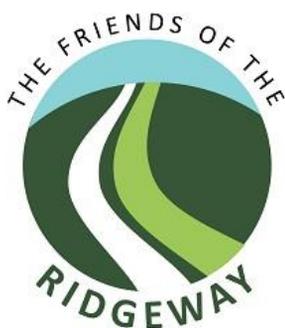
www.annadillon.com

and

www.hedleythorne.com



Anna Dillon





“People say I am a wanton plagiarist. Their words, not mine.”

You can tell Monopoly is an ancient game - the banker can still go to jail.

Bing Crosby. Avoid disappointment by dreaming of a wet Xmas.

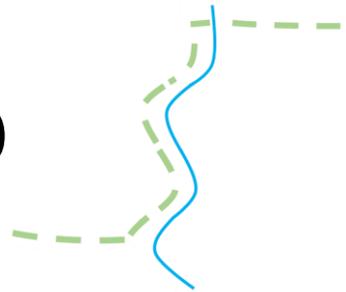
Save on pricey nicotine gum by simply chomping on ordinary chewing gum while having a ciggie.

Started to restart dancing classes majoring on the Hokey Cokey. Just to keep my hand in.

There's a fine line between angling and just standing at the water's edge looking like an idiot.

This spaceship landed right in front of me and out came a cream cake. It was one of those extra-cholesterols.

Mind the Gap



Democracy means government by discussion, but it is only effective if you can stop people talking – *Clement Attlee*

‘Father Brown laid down his cigar and said carefully: “It isn’t that they can’t see the solution. It is that they can’t see the problem.”’ *From ‘The scandal of Father Brown’ (1935), G. K. Chesterton.*

The future isn’t what it used to be

“When you come to a fork in the road, take it” – Yogi Berra, phenomenal baseball player and equally amazing with words



Grooming the Horse

Dave Cavanagh

The Uffington White Horse gets TLC throughout the year but never more so than in August.

IN AUGUST, National Trust (NT) volunteers formed a press gang, waylaying – in the nicest possible way – unsuspecting visitors to the Uffington White Horse on White Horse Hill. Many could not resist the offer of a heavy lump hammer, clumpy knee protectors, and a half-hour or so bent double bashing chalk. It was the occasion of the annual scouring and chalking of the Horse (or, as those of us who live nearby call it, *the White Horse*).



from both the Ridgeway and the Iron Age Uffington Castle. The peace of the Hill was disturbed by an out-of-sync muted hammering sound, like an inebriated percussion orchestra warming up.



The White Horse was breaking the Trades Description Act following the lack of scouring in 2020 because of COVID 19. Emily, daughter of NT Ranger Andy Foley, has started the scouring process. Photos above and left: Andy Foley.

LAST YEAR the Horse missed out on its annual grooming in August, because of COVID. Were it not for COVID the National Trust would have publicised the event widely, instead of just locally, this year, which would have drawn members of the public from far afield to the Hill to groom the Horse. As it was, there was no shortage of takers from those who just happened by, so popular is the Horse, just a stone's throw



The eye before scouring. Photo: Simon Knapper.



I took my own lump hammer and kneeler this year. At the bottom of the photo is the chalk that was added two years ago. Above it is the area that I had flattened by pounding it – probably 30 minutes or more of effort.

“A LOT OF PREP or scouring work, including edging back, was carried out before the chalking”, said Andy, as plants take root in the surface of the Horse, the surrounding turf edges inwards and the chalk surface simply gets a patina of grime.



Walking on the Horse is only allowed at the time of scouring and chalking.

ANDY FOLEY is the NT Ranger who tends the Horse throughout the year and organises the all-hands-to-the-pump action in August. Andy’s passion for the Hill and Castle in general and the Horse in particular comes through when you talk with him.

OVER A PERIOD of three days the public bashed down the small pieces of chalk that were the weathered remains of the larger chunks of chalk that had been spread over the Horse two years ago. Smashing the remains into the surface of the chalk (‘chalking’) replaced any of the consolidated chalk that had been eroded; we don’t want the Horse to lose weight.



My neighbours on the body of the Horse, pounding the old chalk pieces, overseen by a NT Ranger.



Fun for all the family. The Giant’s Steps and the Manger are in the background.

Etc.: end of thinking capacity

“**PERIODIC CUTTING** the grass immediately about the Horse has prevented taller grasses from creating a screen, which from distance shrouds the Horse somewhat, so this helps with its visual impression too,” said Andy Foley. We all want the Horse to be a crisply-edged icon when seen from down in the Vale (of White Horse, of course). Andy added “In addition, the wet conditions this year have meant the grass on the Hill has kept it’s lush appearance, thus providing a darker background for the figure to stand out from.”



Serious tamping by Emily Foley. I think that her dad, Ranger Andy, was having a laugh. Photo: Andy Fowley.

For much of the year grazing sheep keep the grass down though they had been kept off since spring to allow wild flowers to flourish and seed. “We had a bumper year as a result of this,” said Andy Foley, “and with a wet summer enjoyed vast carpets of flowers I haven’t seen the like for a good while.”

MOST OF the regular maintenance and preparative work was done by Andy with his regular NT volunteers and during open days with teams from NT head office in Swindon. “We estimate over 200 people contributed in some way over the three days in late August”, said Andy. “Great memories for families in particular.”



Chalk was excavated and bagged by a contractor.

AFTER PHASE 1 of the chalking it was time to add over 15 tons of new chalk to the flattened surface. The chalk was quarried only a 100 metres or so from the Horse, so it is very much a self-contained operation, no doubt as it has been for the last 3000 years or so since the Horse was created. Buckets were used to transfer the chalk from the ton-containing bags, which was then tipped onto the Horse. Even from a short distance away, let alone down in the Vale, one isn’t aware of its rough surface. The many lumps break the flow of rain water over the Horse, minimising erosion. They might even deter sheep from leaving a deposit. Over the course of a year the weather fractures the chalk stones into smaller pieces, and the cycle of maintaining the Horse in good condition is repeated.

A NEWCOMER to the Ridgeway wrote “My wife and I walked 48k for charity along the Ridgeway on Wednesday 8th of September starting at Overton Hill, to just past Ogborne St. George and then back to Avebury stone circle. We had a great time but managed to get lost and went off course for over 5k, but we were put back on the right path, Thanks to a lovely local lady called Alison, we cannot thank her enough. We loved the scenery and the magic of the Ridgeway and will definitely be returning.” From a post on the Ridgeway and Ancient Tracks of Britain Facebook page.



‘On the skyline’, stone circle at sunset, Avebury. Photo: Jon Lipinsk.



sometimes-butts:

ibnuprofen:

hotdog-friend:

Is that butter?
No, it's Stonehenge.
I can't believe it's not butter

Source: anormaux

Chalkland plant survey

Botanists from the Thames Valley Environmental Records Centre surveyed parts of the Ridgeway in summer, identifying and mapping existing habitats along the route, their extent and botanical species composition. This will improve understanding of the Trail's biodiversity value as a whole, with the potential for positive impacts on a landscape scale. Dropwort, kidney vetch, common twayblade, knapweed broomrape, wild carrot, common milkwort, sainfoin and fairy flax were amongst some of the chalk grassland indicator species found during the survey.

Find out more about this project and more in this edition of the TVERC newsletter <http://ow.ly/rv4K50FJ887> or visit their website www.tverc.org/cms/

Lady's bedstraw



Scabious



Red kite



Above, kestrel spotted from Ivinghoe Beacon. Below, red kite seen from the Ridgeway at Princes Risborough. Photos: Gary Stocker.





Milky Way above Avebury Stone Circle. Photo: Russell Holland.

End-to-Enders



Ridgeway National Trail
@RidgewayNationalTrail · Recreation & sport
website

Learn More

nationaltrail.co.uk

The Ridgeway Facebook Hall of Fame

THOSE WHO TRAVEL from one end of the Ridgeway National Trail to the other are encouraged to tell the Trail Officer about their experience on the Trail's Facebook page. Below are some of those who have done so, in a range of ways: over the course of months; in a week or so; within 24 hours.



"I finally ticked off the whole Ridgeway in one go!"



Ridgeway National Trail

★ Favourites · 9 June · 🌐

How to join our NEW hall of fame

Upon completion of The Ridgeway, we invite walkers, cyclists and horse riders to join, for free, the Ridgeway Facebook Hall of Fame and/or buy a certificate of completion from the Trails online shop. The Hall of Fame displays a photo and a short message about each person or group's Trail experience (more details below).

Walkers must complete all 87 miles of The Ridgeway. Cyclists and horse riders must complete the Trail between Avebury and Goring-on-Thames (whilst the rest of the Trail does not currently cater fully for cyclists and horse riders).

To join the Facebook Hall of Fame for free, we ask you to give us feedback about your Ridgeway experience by completing an online survey. <https://consultations.oxfordshire.gov.uk/.../consultation...> Feedback helps the Ridgeway Officer improve the Trail and also work with others such as accommodation providers to ensure a high quality visitor experience. Details about how to join the Hall of Fame are provided at the end of the survey.

"SO MANY HIGHLIGHTS, the sheer number of Red Kites we saw was astounding. They are an extremely rare occurrence where we live. It was our longest multi-day hike to date and we're already planning to walk Hadrian's Wall NT as soon as we possibly can".

"WE FOUR WALKED the Ridgeway from East to West over several months in short stages. We experienced howling gales on Ivinghoe Beacon, bluebells in the Chilterns, sweltering heat on Whitehorse Hill and wonderful scenery throughout. The Trail is mostly in excellent condition and well signposted."

10-YEAR-OLD DIRK completed the Trail with his family in 2016. "I had wanted to walk the Ridgeway for a while because my Dad has done it several times - his first time was when he was only a little bit older than me. I decided to raise money for the Luton food bank because my family was helped by them. I raised just over £1000. The most physically challenging part was when we had to walk 32 kilometres in one day! Everything on the walk was perfect I wouldn't have changed it at all. I just enjoyed the nature and how lovely the dogs were and how friendly everyone was. I would recommend it because it is so nice to spend a week in the countryside".

Autumn FoR committee meeting

THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE of the Friends of the Ridgeway met in September for a quarterly meeting. We were joined by Sarah Wright, the Ridgeway National Trail Project Officer, working for the Ridgeway Partnership that manages the Trail. The venue was the Court Hill Centre, located on top of the scarp slope of the Downs above Letcombe Regis and Wantage.

The committee discussed, amongst other things,

Membership, which numbered 355 subscribing members, including 11 organisations. Action would be taken to encourage more parish councils along the route of the Ridgeway to join.

A new information leaflet to encourage people to join the Friends. It is now available to download from the homepage of our website. Do display it or send it to anyone whom you think might be interested in joining us.

Reorganisation and new material on our website.

The design of information boards for points along the Great Chalk Way.

Swire Ridgeway Arts Prize 2022 (discussed elsewhere in this newsletter)

The 40th anniversary in 2022 of the formation of Friends of the Ridgeway

The 50th anniversary of the Ridgeway National Trail in 2023

Development of Britchcombe Farm, Uffington White Horse Hill, as an all year round facility, including static caravans (discussed elsewhere in this newsletter)



COURT HILL is an outdoor centre, managed by the Court Hill Trust. It is only 500 metres from the Ridgeway National Trail, just off the A338. It is a great place at which to break one's journey along the Trail, either for a comfortable stop for refreshments, including hot lunches, or for staying overnight (bunkhouse and camping). One can sit on benches with stunning views over the Vale of White Horse to the Chilterns and Cotswolds on the horizon.

www.courthill.org.uk

