



The Ridgeway NATIONAL TRAIL



Newsletter

ISSUE 4

WINTER 2016

News for everyone who enjoys and cares for The Ridgeway

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Ten year old becomes a Hero after charity hike

Interview with Dirk Withnail from Luton

What inspired you to walk The Ridgeway? How much did you raise for charity?

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 wanted to support Luton Foodbank because they helped my family when we were struggling a few years ago. I raised just over £1000.



What were the particular challenges you faced? Training was sometimes tough because it was usually very hot. Finding good spots to camp was a challenge and to reduce the weight of our rucksacks my Aunt, Uncle, Grandma and Grandpa hid food parcels in advance of the walk. Another challenge was learning to avoid dog mess, especially on the western half near car parks and road

crossings. The most physically challenging part was walking 32 km in one day!

What did you enjoy most about the whole experience? Would you recommend this to your friends? I just enjoyed the nature and how lovely the dogs were and how friendly everyone was. I would recommend it.

What was your most 'wow' moment?! Finally seeing the 1 mile away from Ivinghoe Beacon sign! Being named Young Hero of the Year at the Luton & Bedfordshire Community Awards was amazing too!

Funniest moment? When we got to Wayland Smithy and I was running inside the small cave. And when a little French Bulldog walked up to us and just stood in front of us for a few minutes, looking at us. He was funny and cute.

What did you learn about yourself as a result of this challenge? I learnt that I was much fitter than I thought I was. It turned out my Dad had been giving me a heavier rucksack for the training walks!

Lastly, would you do it again? If I had the chance, in a few years' time. My little brother wants to do it – my Dad thinks my Mum should help him to give us a break!

Check out Dirk's blog and funny photos at: <http://dirkwalks.blogspot.co.uk>

The Ridgeway NATIONAL TRAIL



Living Ridgeway

The Ridgeway is an 87 mile (139km) signed trail open to the public to enjoy walking, cycling, horseriding and events in attractive countryside.

The route lies to the west of London, passing over the chalk hills of the Chilterns AONB and North Wessex Downs AONB, taking in rural villages and market towns. Visitors come from near and far, including tourists from the United States and Europe, and are served by numerous local accommodation providers, shops, eating places and visitor attractions.

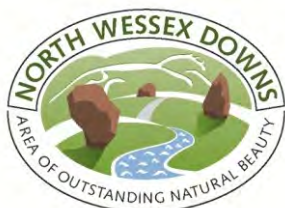
The Ridgeway is popularly known as Britain's oldest road - parts of the Trail follow tracks used by travellers, herdsmen and soldiers over the centuries. The landscape is dotted with historic features and chalk grassland flowers, butterflies and farmland wildlife are a highlight too.



The Ridgeway is one of 15 National Trails in England and Wales. It is also part of an international network of trails called the International Appalachian Trail.



The Ridgeway is managed by a group of organisations called The Ridgeway Partnership. Day-to-day work is led by the National Trails Team hosted by Oxfordshire County Council. The Partnership works with user groups, landowners, local councils, local communities and others to realise social, economic and environmental benefits from The Ridgeway.



Plan your Visit

Plan your day visit or holiday to The Ridgeway using our interactive online map: <http://www.nationaltrail.co.uk/ridgeway> Our website also lists events along the Trail and there are circular walks and rides leaflets to download for free.

The Ridgeway Companion guide lists details of campsites, B&Bs, hotels, self-catering cottages and inns around the area. Other useful contacts, such as taxis, hospitals, vets, are provided as well as car park locations. It costs £4.95 and is available from our online shop: <http://shop.nationaltrail.co.uk>

Ridgeway Wildlife Corridor

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Natural Ridgeway

There are 29 areas along The Ridgeway that are of national or international importance for their flora and fauna. Top of the list are the two National Nature Reserves of Fyfield Down, Wiltshire, and Aston Rowant, Oxfordshire.

Wildlife needs to move about the landscape to find food, shelter and mating partners. The Ridgeway, as a 'green corridor' for much of its length, plays a role in helping wildlife movement. The Trail links up with other 'corridors' such as hedgerows, field margins and other rights of way to provide a widespread network.

The Trail's ecological significance is heightened by its association with numerous areas of semi-natural habitat along its length, particularly species-rich chalk grassland and the renowned Chiltern beech woodlands. Within the boundaries of The Ridgeway, there are also chalk grassland verges and native scrub.



Common rock rose—not so common!

Credit: Björn S..., Wikimedia Commons.

Hotspots for flora and fauna along The Ridgeway are the 22 Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs). Some are managed by nature conservation organisations such as the Wildlife Trusts and National Trust.

Find nature reserves to visit on our website www.nationaltrail.co.uk/ridgeway/plan

The Ridgeway Partnership has started working with others to do more to recognise and conserve the Trail's natural heritage.

In November, 25 volunteers from the National Trail Team, National Trust and BBOWT (Buckinghamshire, Berkshire and Oxfordshire Wildlife Trust) teamed up to clear scrub and coppice hazel along The Ridgeway through Bacombe Hill and Coombe Hill, near Wendover in Buckinghamshire. This work restored overgrown chalk grassland and opened up The Ridgeway for walkers.



Gathering for a big scrub bash at Coombe Hill

Produced by the National Trails Team on behalf of The Ridgeway Partnership.

www.nationaltrail.co.uk/ridgeway

Events along The Ridgeway

Enjoy events on The Ridgeway. Visit our [website](#) for more details and more events. Many events require booking in advance.

Join an event or seek solitude

There's something for everyone along The Ridgeway. Check out what's on and plan to either join in or find a quiet spot! Our most comprehensive events listing is on our website but there are some events we are not aware of. Many event organisers work with us to keep local communities informed.

25 Nov - 22 Jan 2017 *Wildlife Photographer of the Year Highlights*

Tring, Herts (Natural History Museum)

Stunning annual exhibition displaying winning images

Thu 1 - 4 Dec 2016 *Christmas Art Fair*

College Lake, Herts (BBOWT)

Artists display & sell jewellery, photography, ceramics & watercolours

Fri 2 Dec *Winter warmer walks*

Avebury, Wilts (National Trust)

Ramble around the stone circles with an archaeologist

Sat 3 Dec *Hedgelaying*

College Lake, Herts (BBOWT)

Learn to rejuvenate ageing hedges

Sat 10 Dec *Green Christmas*

College Lake, Herts (BBOWT)

Family fun with College Lake elves—decorations & activities inside & out

Sun 18 Dec *Music, lights and merriment: Christmas event at Avebury*

Avebury, Wilts (National Trust)

Begin your Christmas festivities at a late opening event

Sun 18 Dec 2016, 2 Jan 2017 and 19 Feb

Guided walk around College Lake.

College Lake (BBOWT)

Find out about wildlife found at College Lake at this time of year.

Sat 21 Jan 2017 *The Stars Above: The Solar System*

Tring, Herts (Natural History Museum)

Special talk & observation event with local astronomers & museum experts

Mon 13 and Fri 17 Feb *Tring Park Scavenger Hunt*

Tring, Herts (Natural History Museum)

Two-hour activity, includes a 20-minute steep walk (for ages 5+)

Thurs 17 Feb *Future of the Ridgeway*

Faringdon, Oxon (Friends of the Ridgeway)

Meet & hear from The Ridgeway's Trail Officer

Thurs 17 March *The Middle Ridgeway—History and Environment*

Faringdon, Oxon (Friends of The Ridgeway)

Hear from Eric Jones about his new book.



The Ridge Walk 2017

CONQUER THE WALK

Date: Saturday 24 – Sunday 25 June 2017

Location: Oxfordshire and Wiltshire

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Orienteering on Horseback

TREC is a sport testing the skills of horse and rider in planning and executing a long distance ride in unfamiliar country. It originated in France and was introduced into the UK in the early 1990s.

TREC is a great sport that any horse/pony and rider can enjoy.



Niki King's horse Torouga enjoys the views from White Horse Hill, Oxon.

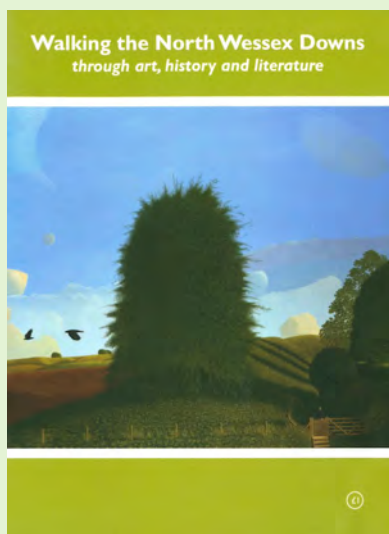
A TREC competition was held on The Ridgeway in September involving forty nine horses and their riders. Horses' obedience and manouverability were tested over 16 obstacles at Sower Hill Stables near Uffington, Oxfordshire. It was a sort of dog agility for horses, including a gate and riding through a gap. Riders then set off with maps to navigate to a series of checkpoints across the Lambourn Downs. There were set speeds to follow, typically 7 to 9 kmph (4 to 6 mph).

The event was made more challenging with rain - it was one of the wettest days of the summer. One horse slipped and fell on The Ridgeway. However, three riders finished with only two time penalties over the whole route. After the event, several riders and volunteers said they would be returning to ride more of The Ridgeway area, but hopefully in better weather! Such organised events are a great introduction to riding The Ridgeway and meeting other riders.

Help make The Ridgeway a great place for horse riding.

The Ridgeway Partnership is working with local riders to improve the provision of riding information on our website and review facilities for riders on The Ridgeway. Are you a local rider who could volunteer to check our circular ride routes are in good order or support riding events? Please get in touch: ridgeway@oxfordshire.gov.uk
Thanks to Janice Bridger (British Horse Society) and TREC (www.trecgb.com) for this article!

Literary Circular Walk



Follow in the footsteps of great writers who found inspiration in this landscape

Liddington Hill circular walk

4.5 miles – allow at least 2.5 hours

No stiles, can get muddy, one steep descent

Download details from www.nationaltrail.co.uk/ridgeway/be-inspired or buy the full booklet of four walks from Wiltshire Museum, Devizes

Discover **Shipley Bottom**, a fine example of an enclosed coombe or short valley once described by the writer and poet **Edward Thomas** (1878-1917) as 'walled on every side by down and sky'. Thomas is among 16 Great War poets commemorated on a stone in Westminster Abbey's Poet's Corner. His writing has influenced the works of nature writer **Robert Macfarlane** who wrote 'The Old Ways' first published in 2012.

Follow a route used by seemingly forgotten poet **Charles Hamilton Sorley** (1895-1915). He studied at Marlborough College from 1908 to 1913 and his experiences on the downs inspired poems such as **Barbury Castle**. (**Sorley's memorial stone** lies further west along The Ridgeway, near Ogbourne St George).

Wikimedia Commons image 7256637, photographer unknown



Victorian writer Richard Jefferies

Visit **Liddington Hill**, the site of a memorial to **Richard Jefferies** (1848-1887) and **Alfred Williams** (1877-1930), both of whom wrote about the hill. Williams was a self-taught writer who described Swindon railway life and Wiltshire villages. Jefferies' wanderings across the Wiltshire downlands are thought to have inspired his mystical rapport with nature, as expressed most fully in his autobiography 'The Story of My Heart'. When Jefferies stood on the Liddington Hill, he enjoyed a view 'over broad plain, beautiful with wheat and enclosed by a perfect amphitheatre of green hills'. The view today is different and unfortunately motorway noise can be a feature! See Jefferies' family memorabilia, archive material and more at the **Richard Jefferies Museum** in Coate, near Swindon.

By the time I had reached the summit, I had entirely forgotten the petty circumstances and annoyances of existence. I felt myself, myself Richard Jefferies, The Story of My Heart, 1883

Whiter Whiteleaf Cross



The cross should be viewed from a distance, rather than on the hill itself, but visitors to Whiteleaf Hill can enjoy fine views, a Neolithic barrow and World War I practice trenches instead! A circular walk for Whiteleaf Hill is also available to download from www.nationaltrail.co.uk/ridgeway/be-inspired

One of the distinctive chalk marks along The Ridgeway known as Whiteleaf Cross, near Princes Risborough in Buckinghamshire, has been freshened up. The chalk was meticulously weeded and scoured to a brighter white by Chiltern Society volunteers and Rope Works specialist contractors. Restoration of the middle strip will take place in future, once Historic England have confirmed the best approach.



Left: Contractors worked on the steep lower slopes using safety ropes



Right: Chiltern Society volunteers working hard to clean the top of the cross.

Remembering Lt Grosvenor

Look out for a small memorial that has recently been restored on The Ridgeway near East Isley in West Berkshire. The Grosvenor Estate maintains it in memory of 2nd Lt Grosvenor's fatal accident here during military training in 1947. The work was carried out by stone masons from Abingdon Stone and Marble Ltd.



Discover Ridgeway history with Tony Robinson!

Watch Tony Robinson explore The Ridgeway in his Channel 4 programme Britain's Ancient Tracks (available online for a short time only): <http://www.channel4.com/programmes/britains-ancient-tracks-with-tony-robinson/on-demand/64588-002>

For more information about Whiteleaf Cross, the Grosvenor memorial and other historic features along The Ridgeway, explore the list of attractions at

www.nationaltrail.co.uk/ridgeway/attractions

Swire Ridgeway Art Prize



Friends of The Ridgeway

The Swire Ridgeway Arts Prize will be awarded on Sunday 23 April 2017 and an exhibition of entries will follow.

Last date for entries is
Monday 27 February 2017.

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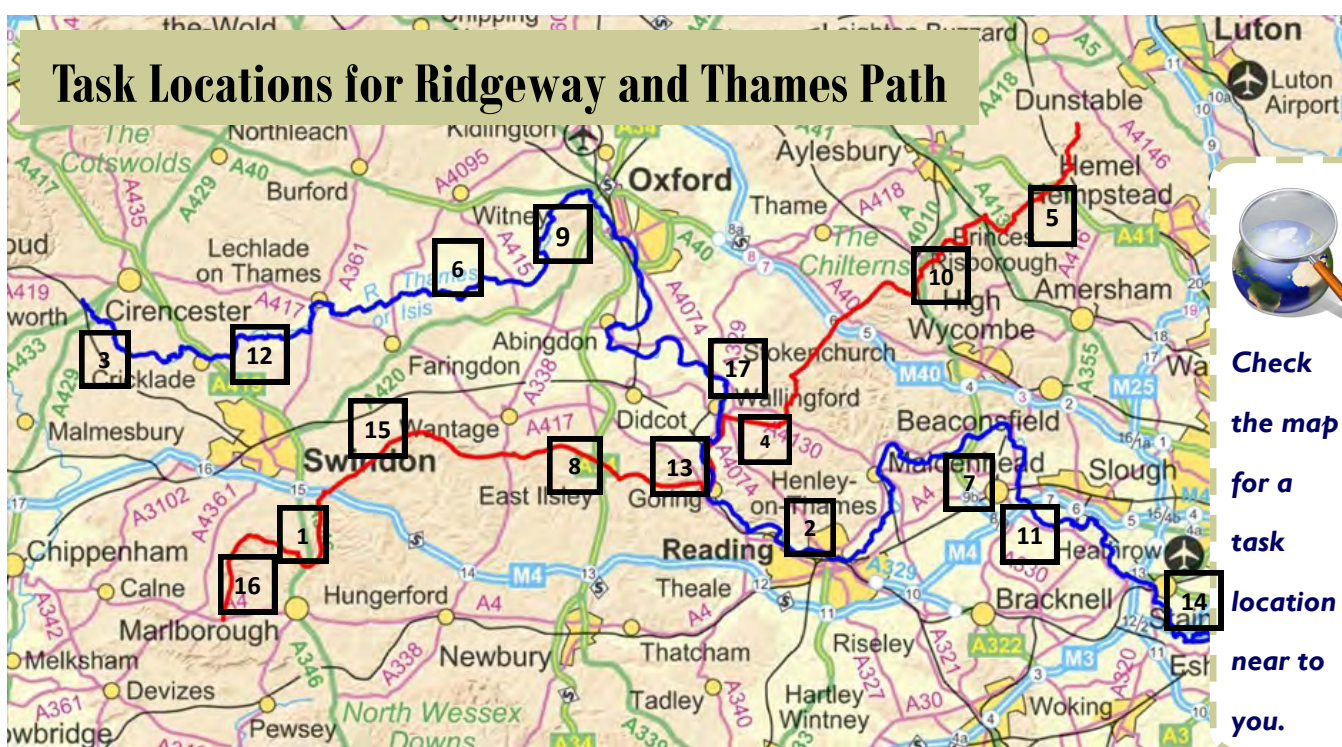
Practical work is carried out along The Ridgeway to ensure walkers, cyclists and horseriders enjoy using it. Work is carried out by the National Trail Team, local highway authorities, land-owners and contractors. The Chiltern Society do occasional work on The Ridgeway in the Chilterns. Volunteers are welcome to help maintain The Ridgeway and Thames Path by joining the task team led by the National Trail Team. The location and activities for the next 3 months are shown below. Please ensure that you book early as the practical tasks are popular. Locations for tasks may change and volunteer numbers can be limited due to type of task.

Volunteer to help with a task by contacting the National Trail Team.

Book in advance and as soon as possible.

E: nt.volunteers@oxfordshire.gov.uk **T:** 01865 810211

Task Locations for Ridgeway and Thames Path



**Check
the map
for a
task
location
near to
you.**

December

- 5th RW Upper Upham WC **1**
- 6th TP Little Marlow WC **2**
- 9th TP Ashton Keynes WC - CG **3**
- 12th TP Little Marlow WC **2**
- 13th RW Grimms Ditch WC **4**
- 14th RW Cadsden WC **5**
- 16th TP Ashton Keynes WC - CG **3**

KEY

RW— The Ridgeway
TP—Thames Path
WC – winter clearance
CG – Corporate Group
R – Revetment
WS – Workshop
G – Gate

Task Dates

January

- 4th RW Cadsden WC **5**
- 5th TP Chimney WC **6**
- 9th RW TBC
- 10th TP Maidenhead WC **7**
- 11th RW Bury Downs WC **8**
- 12th Eynsham - WS **9**
- 16th RW Princes Risborough WC **10**
- 17th TP Dorney Reach WC **11**
- 18th RW Lodge Hill WC **10**
- 23rd TP Castle Eaton WC **12**
- 24th TP Eynsham - WS **9**
- 30th RW Streatley WC **13**
- 31st TP Maidenhead WC **7**

February

- 6th TP Marlow WC **2**
- 7th TP Chertsey G **14**
- 8th RW Ashbury (Carparks) WC **15**
- 9th TP Ashton Keynes R **3**
- 13th TP Chertsey G **14**
- 14th RW Lodge Hill WC **10**
- 16th RW TBC
- 20th RW Grimms Ditch WC **4**
- 21st TP Chimney WC **6**
- 22nd RW Smeathes Ridge WC **16**
- 23rd TP TBC
- 27th RW TBC
- 28th TP Benson WC **17**

Make it easy to report problems using a phone app

We have a team of volunteers who regularly check for problems on The Ridgeway. Their reports help us to improve the Trail. We depend on them to provide photos and accurate location details—using grid references where possible—to map these issues effectively. National Trail Volunteer Martin Beecher found an App which makes reporting easy – so we asked him to explain how it works....

It is so easy to take a photo using a mobile phone.....and there are apps to help you record information about when and where you have taken a photo.

The name of the Android app is 'GPS Map Camera', available from the Play Store. The app is very easy to use and is also free. I believe there is something similar available for the iPhone as well.

It uses the inbuilt GPS receiver that most smartphones/iPhone have. It takes one photo but stores two pictures. One of them is just the photo, but the other contains the date, time, latitude and longitude. By default, the photo file name contains all the date/time and location details which makes for a quite a long name.

What it displays can be configurable and it is possible to show two formats at the same time, i.e. Decimal (51.760381,-1.277131) and DMS (51°45'37" N, 1°16'37" W). There are options that allow other data to be recorded such as including a map but I found this too small to be of any real use.

An important tip is to allow the app enough time for the GPS to find the signal before taking the first photo otherwise it approximates your location using mast triangulation which is not accurate/precise enough.

Of course, there are a number of apps that claim to do similar results but I found this to be the best free app, at least for Android smartphones. You may see some adverts but I have never found these intrusive and they don't appear on the photos. If you have found a better app then please let the National Trail Team know!





We need your help!

Secure the future of National Trails.

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www.nationaltrail.co.uk/ridgeway/donate

Spring edition

**We'd love to hear
from you !**

Get in touch to provide
feedback and suggest arti-
cles for future newsletters.

Deadline for submissions
6 Feb 2017

**Spring newsletter
coverage**
March — July 2017

Latest News



Follow us on Twitter
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For more detailed news, go
to

[www.nationaltrail.co.uk/
ridgeway/news](http://www.nationaltrail.co.uk/ridgeway/news)

Ridgeway Christmas shopping



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<http://shop.nationaltrail.co.uk/collections/ridgeway>



The Ridgeway National Trail Team



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