



The Ridgeway NATIONAL TRAIL



Newsletter

SUMMER 2018

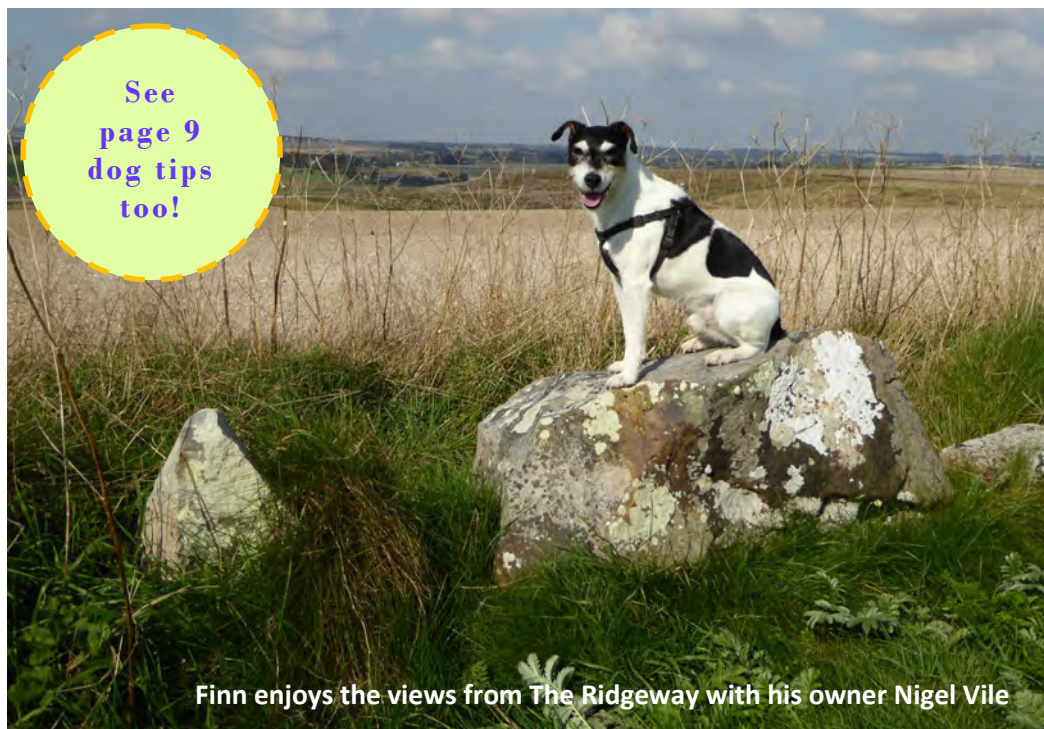
News for everyone who enjoys and cares for The Ridgeway

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New ideas for dog walking on The Ridgeway



Finn enjoys the views from The Ridgeway with his owner Nigel Vile

It's all too easy to stick to the same walks each day with your dog, but exploring new places is stimulating for you and your pooch. The Ridgeway offers many wonderful opportunities to try new walks - there are places for your dog to run free, routes avoiding roads and contact with livestock, plenty of dog-friendly pubs and inspiring scenery to explore.

Now is the time to try a new walk, following the publication last year of 'The Ridgeway Dog Walker's Guide'. Published by Countryside Books and written by two dog owners, Debbie Kendall and Nigel Vile, the book presents 20 circular walks suited to dog walkers, each taking in a section of The Ridgeway and covering 2.5 to 8.5 miles. There are descriptions and maps about the interesting landscape features you will see on the way, as well as dog-related details including terrain, dog-friendly pubs/cafes, nearest vets, livestock information, stiles and road walking.

The routes take in well-known spots such as Avebury, Barbury Castle, Uffington, the River Thames, Whiteleaf Hill, Chequers and Ivinghoe Beacon. The book also introduces less familiar but great locations, including the pretty villages of Bishopstone and Bledlow, Aston Rowant National Nature Reserve and Ashridge Estate.

So next time your dog is begging for a walk, try a new walk along The Ridgeway!

Birding along The Ridgeway

By Neil Bucknell, Berkshire Ornithological Club

*Beginner birdwatchers should look out for **Yellowhammers**. The Ridgeway is a hotspot for this species and their bright yellow plumage makes them easy to identify.*



© Andreas Trepte,
www.photo-natur.net

On a bleak day, the open ridge along the escarpment of the Berkshire Downs can seem like one of the most inhospitable areas of southern England. It may therefore be a surprise to know that it is an important area for birdlife, particularly for some of the farmland bird species whose decline has been a source of concern in recent decades.

So what might you see? Thanks to surveys carried out by the Berkshire Ornithological Club and others, a 'bird atlas' has been produced which shows us what has been seen in the past along The Ridgeway and elsewhere.

In summer, perhaps surprisingly, the Downs are home to three species of wading birds. Two are rare. One is the **Stone Curlew**, one of Britain's rarest breeding birds. Years of cooperation between local farmers and the RSPB have

brought the species back from the brink of extinction locally. If you see one, please do not attempt to get close - they are very susceptible to disturbance. There is also a small breeding population of **Curlews** in the area, a species not recorded as a breeding bird until the 1980s. These populations are found in areas with racehorse gallops. The most widespread wading bird, although declining, is the **Lapwing**. It prefers areas with sparse vegetation to nest, so seeks out fields of spring-sown cereals, well-grazed sheep pasture, or areas set aside for conservation.

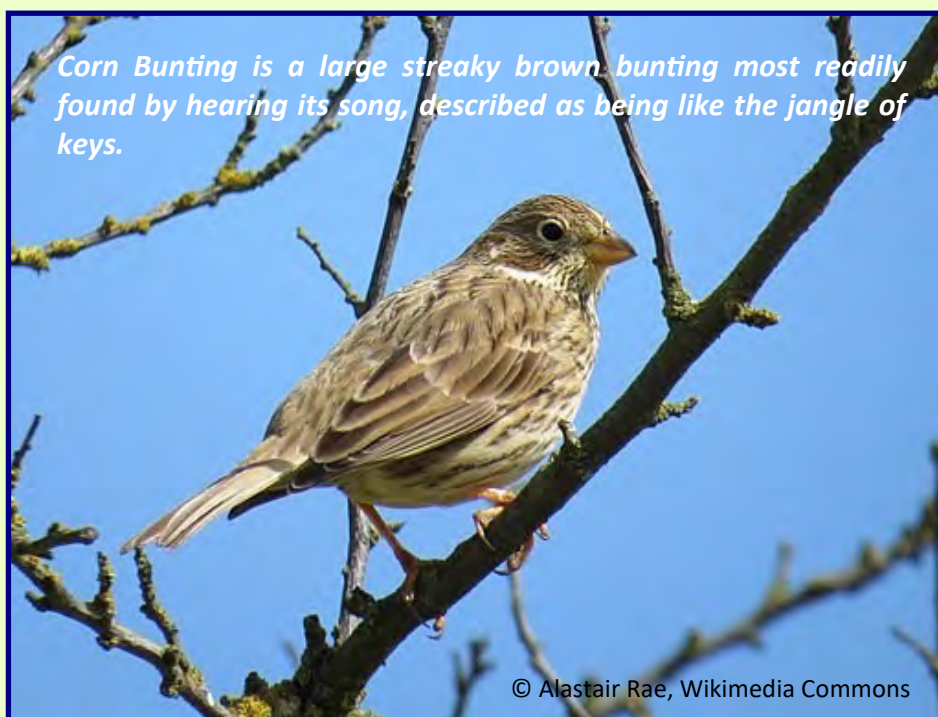
Among songbirds, a speciality of the area is the **Corn Bunting**. Once widespread on agricultural land in the Thames and Chilterns area, it is now mostly confined to the open tops of the scarp along which The Ridgeway runs. This area is also the best place locally to find three other



breeding songbird species whose numbers and range have declined in recent decades: **Meadow Pipit**, **Willow Warbler** and **Yellow Wagtail**. The last are very scarce, having largely disappeared from its traditional breeding areas in wet meadows in river valleys and now associated with arable crops. There are also still plenty of **Skylarks**, **Linnets** and **Yellowhammers**, birds that have declined in the countryside as a whole, and a few **Reed Buntings** who find that oilseed rape makes an acceptable alternative to their usual waterside breeding habitat.

factors whose numbers can fluctuate wildly from year to year and season to season. **Quail** was recorded all along the Berkshire Downs Ridgeway during the last irruption in 2011.

One group of birds that has generally done better in recent years is the bird of prey. **Buzzards** have spread back across the area since the 1980s, and they have been joined by **Red Kites** that were successfully reintroduced to the Chilterns in the late 1980s. Look out for flocks of the latter gathering at harvest time to feed behind combine



Corn Bunting is a large streaky brown bunting most readily found by hearing its song, described as being like the jangle of keys.

© Alastair Rae, Wikimedia Commons

Two species of gamebird are noteworthy. There is still a small population of the threatened **Grey Partridge**. The Downs are also one of the best places to find **Quail**, an irregularly occurring irruptive species. Irruptive bird species are those that respond to irregular changes in their food supply or other

harvesters, or later behind the tractors when the stubble is ploughed in.

Winter sees the departure of some of the breeding species, but others remain and form winter flocks which can be of over 100 in case of **Linnets**, and over 50 in the case of **Corn Buntings**. Numbers of other species such as

Cont...Birding along The Ridgeway

Meadow Pipit, **Skylark** and **Lapwing** are swollen by an influx of birds from continental Europe, and they are joined by winter visitors like **Fieldfare** and **Golden Plover**. Surprisingly, a small bird normally associated with coasts and heaths, the **Stonechat**, winters in small numbers. Look out for the black headed male flying up and down between fences and the ground, feeding.



Look for flocks of **Golden Plover** migrating northwards in spring © Goldregenpfeifer, Wikimedia Commons

Our birds of prey are joined by occasional **Merlins** and **Hen Harriers**, and a small regular number of **Short-eared Owls**. The latter are another species that do not tolerate disturbance well, so if you see one please do not try to get close. Another regular (not quite annual) visitor is the **Great Grey Shrike**.

During the day, large flocks of gulls, especially **Lesser Black-backed Gulls** feed on cultivated land and pig fields, commuting back to roost overnight on the flooded gravel pits in the river valleys around Reading.

The changeover in spring and autumn between summer and winter visitors is a good time to birdwatch along The Ridgeway. There can be spectacular visible migration movements - notably of **Swallows** and **House Martins** in autumn, or northbound **Golden Plover** in spring. There are some species that normally only occur on migration, notably the **Wheatear**, a songbird of open country with a conspicuous white rump that passes through on its way between its wintering grounds in Africa and its breeding range in the uplands of northern Britain, Scandinavia, Iceland and Greenland.

So, the next time you set off for a walk on The Ridgeway, don't forget to take your binoculars! If you see anything unusual, please let the Berkshire Bird Club know, either by posting records on the national Bird Track site, or using the local Berks Birds website www.Berksbirds.co.uk.

For more information about birds in the area, purchase one of the few remaining copies of the Berkshire Ornithological Club's atlas book **The Birds of Berkshire 2013**—see <http://berksoc.org.uk> for the atlas and species distribution maps. A Thames and Chilterns Bird Atlas can also be found at <http://thamesandchilternbirdatlas.org.uk/>



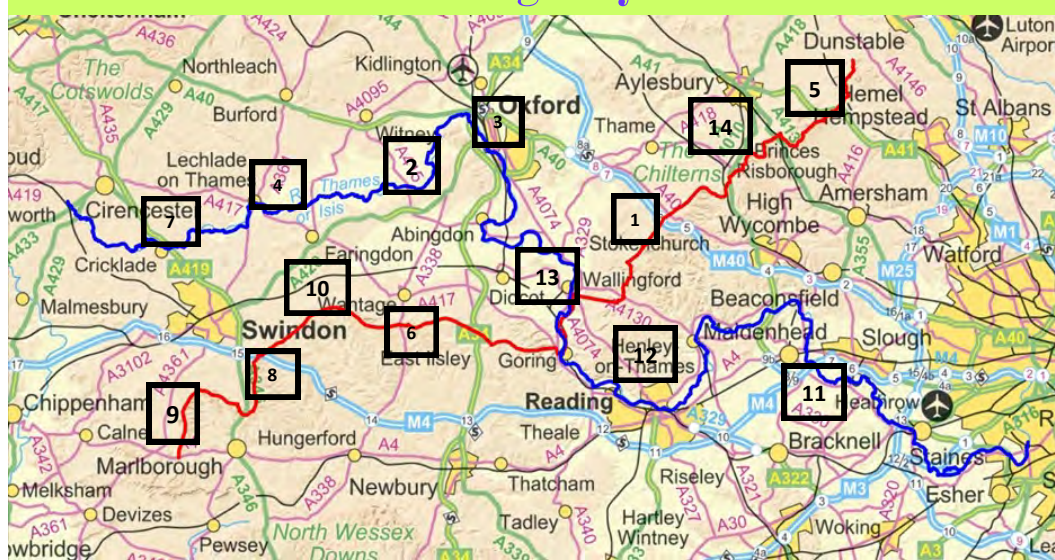
Practical work is carried out along The Thames Path and The Ridgeway to ensure walkers enjoy using it. Work is carried out by the National Trail Team, volunteers, local highway authorities, landowners and contractors. Volunteers are welcome to help maintain the Thames Path by joining the task team led 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 you.

Task Dates

July

- 23rd TP Grafton **GC 3**
- 25th TP Cricklade/Ashton Keynes **GC 7**
- 26th RW Wantage **GC 10**
- 30th TP Lechlade/Kelmscott **GC 4**

August

- 1st RW Liddington Hill **GC 9**
- 7th RW Blowingstone to Sparsholt
Firs **GC 10**
- 8th TP Clifton Hampden & Little
Wittenham **GC 13**
- 9th **WS 2**
- 20th RW South Stoke **GC 2**
- 21st TP **WS 2**
- 22nd TP Chimney Meadows **GC 4**
- 28th TP & RW Ashton Keynes &
Ogbourne St George **FI 7**
- 29th Western TP **S** Location TBC
- 30th TP Grafton **GC 3**

September

- 3rd RW Bury Down Display Board Install **8**
- 4th TP Sonning **MC 12**
- 5th TP Inglesham **MC 7**
- 7th RW & TP North Stoke Village Hall **MTS 12**
- 10th TP Oxford sections **MC 3**
- 11th RW Wendover Library **MTS 14**
- 12th RW Court Hill Centre, Wantage **MTS 10**
- 17th TP Shillingford to Benson **MC 2**
- 18th TP Chimney Meadows **MC 4**
- 19th RW Princes Risborough **G 14**
- 24th RW West **MC**
- 25th TP Marlow **MC 12**
- 26th TP Chimney Meadows **MC 4**

KEY: FI = Fingerpost Installation G = Gate GC = Grass cutting M = mowing MC = Maintenance Cut
MTS = Monitor Training session S = Signage TBC = To be confirmed WS = Workshop

Note that we no longer receive post at Signal Court, Eynsham.

All volunteers please contact us at Speedwell House, Speedwell Street, Oxford OX1 1NE. Thanks.

Pedal Power!

Sporting Ridgeway

In June, The Ridgeway hosted the annual Macmillan Castles Bike Ride. In its 22nd year, it is very much an established event in the Ridgeway calendar. Lew Lawton, the event's chief route planner, tells us how it went this year.....



Glorious weather swelled the numbers taking part to over 250 riders, with many entering on the day to add to those who had booked in advance. Each rider helps raise money for the charity Macmillan Cancer Support.

A range of courses catered for different riders, from 10 miles for newbies and families, 20 miles for those with a bit more time to spare, and a challenging 32 mile ride for experienced riders. Many of the riders come back year after year to take part. Over the years the event has grown and is now one of the most popular events in Swindon's Cycling calendar.

As always, the Croft Sports Centre in Swindon's Old Town was the event base and start point. From here, a police escort took the riders to the edge of the Marlborough Downs where the off-road fun started. The 10 milers enjoyed a short flat section of trail including a section on the National Cycle Network and then made their way back via Chiseldon and Coate Water County Park. The more experienced riders also used the NCN route going west for a while, before negotiating climbs at Barbury Castle and Four Mile Clump.

The huge numbers of beaming faces arriving back at Croft was testament to the fact that people enjoy the



event despite the hilly sections of the course! Many remarked how proud they were to have completed the challenge and do something for a worthwhile charity.

As a charity event, there are lots of volunteers involved. The Macmillan team consisted of about 50 volunteers, making sure the ride was held safely, riders followed the correct routes and refreshments were provided along the way. At HQ, Angela Pugh and Betsy Lawton led a group of volunteers who booked riders in and welcomed them back on their return. St John Ambulance volunteers were also stationed along the route; fortunately it was another year with no injuries to deal with. A couple of off-road motorbike riders also help out by quickly getting to the location of any problem, medical or mechanical.

The event is also supported by various businesses. Each year the main sponsors Mitchell Cycles donate a bike to the person raising the most amount of sponsorship and regularly this goes to someone who has raised well over £500. This year the winner, though still to be ratified, is a lady who raised over £1350 with an equal amount being matched by her employer. Fundraising is much easier with the internet now. The Macmillan Castles Bike Ride has an event website

www.castlesbikeride.co.uk, online event entry, JustGiving fundraising webpages and Facebook page which all help riders fundraise for the charity.



Other supporters include Fyffes who supply bananas (what else?), Arkells Brewery who donate bottled water and many others who supply cakes. The local MTB club MB Swindon provide on-bike Marshals and “sweepers” to ride the route to ensure everyone has got round.

As road cycling is becoming more popular, Lew Lawton has modified a British Cycling Skyride so that people who only have a road bike can take part. The 22 mile road bike course uses some of the same roads as the mountain bike course but includes the notorious Snap Hill from Ogbourne St George towards Aldbourne.

Next year's event will be held on 2nd June 2019. The organisers are hoping more teams will take part – a shield is awarded to the largest team on the day! New volunteers are also welcome as several marshalls who have been involved since the beginning are looking to retire. Contact Lew Lawton cycle.medic@btinternet.com for information.

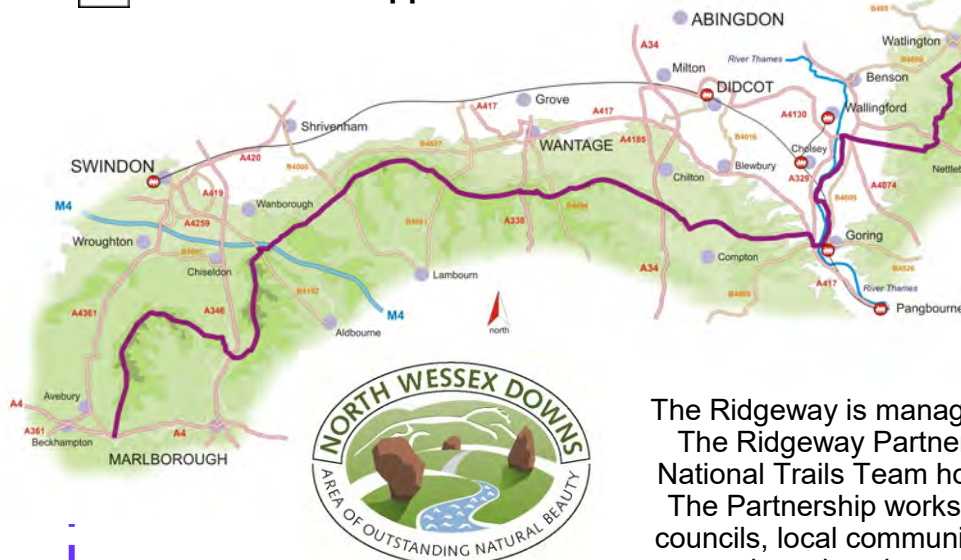
The Ridgeway NATIONAL TRAIL

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.



**OXFORDSHIRE
COUNTY COUNCIL**

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

Find out about events, car parks, pubs, places to stay overnight and more using our online interactive map:
www.nationaltrail.co.uk/ridgeway

Guidebooks and maps are available from our online shop: <http://shop.nationaltrail.co.uk>

Download free leaflets from our website to take out on the Trail.



Follow the acorn along the Trail!

Celebrate your Visit

Souvenirs are available on our online shop:
<http://shop.nationaltrail.co.uk>

Certificates await those people who take on the challenge of walking or running every mile of the Trail from Overton to Ivinghoe or riding all the miles open to cyclists and horse riders from Overton to Streatley: www.nationaltrail.co.uk/ridgeway/completion-certificate

Share your great experiences
TripAdvisor 'The Ridgeway National Trail'
Twitter @TheRidgeway1972.

Top tips for dog walkers

Knowing how to care for your dog and avoid problems on walks will mean you, your four-legged friend and everyone else has an enjoyable time on the Trail. We've gathered together some tips and latest news so that you can feel confident out on The Ridgeway.

Avoid the stress! The Kennel Club have recently teamed up with the National Farmers Union to provide advice to dog owners about 'livestock worrying'. Most dog owners would recognize that dogs shouldn't attack livestock but livestock can also suffer stress from more minor 'confrontations' or from being chased. Stress can cause pregnant sheep to miscarry, for example.



Sadie cools down in a puddle
© Debbie Kendall

A scary but true fact is that the Dogs (Protection of Livestock) Act 1953 sets out a fine of up to £1,000 for worrying livestock, which includes not having your dog under close control in a field of sheep, even if he doesn't harm them. This Act also permits a farmer to shoot a dog which is worrying livestock.

Whilst there are parts of The Ridgeway where dogs can run free, the Trail is surrounded by farmland so it is important to check for livestock when entering a field. You will often hear sheep before you see them. To avoid any risk and ensure peace

for all concerned, keep your dog under control and ideally on a lead in case of unpredictable behavior. Please follow the advice of signs put up by farmers as they are trying to protect their livestock and there may be a history of livestock worrying in the area. Take extra care around pregnant animals and also young animals.

What to do around cattle Cows can be curious and calves skittish - move calmly and don't linger. The Kennel Club advice is to put your dog on a lead and skirt around cattle, never passing between calves and adults. If you need to get away, drop the lead so that you don't hinder each other's escape.

Check your dog for ticks after a walk

Don't leave poo where it will be stepped on!

Dog poo on The Ridgeway is the most common complaint received by the National Trail Team. Make your dog foul away from where people walk or ride, and take bags of poo to a bin. The Ridgeway is not 'manned' like a country park and there definitely isn't a dog poo fairy tidying them away!

Bring water and a bowl The Ridgeway passes through remote countryside so come prepared.

In the bin!

The National Trail Team can look into installing dog poo bins along The Ridgeway if dog walkers report where they are needed.



Open Access Land law about leads On Open Access Land, by law you must keep your dog on a short lead between 1 March and 31 July in case of ground-nesting birds and all year round near farm animals. A dog running near a nest might be enough to scare the adult birds away, leaving the young to perish. See our website and on-site signs for details of Open Access Land along the Trail.

Share and care for the Trail We want the Trail to be a welcoming, enjoyable place and everyone should show consideration towards one another. If you know your dog is prone to chasing cyclists or runners or you can see young children or riders with nervous horses nearby, keep your dog close and reassure passers-by.

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! Many event organisers work with us to keep local communities informed and our website is a good place to start to find information about events on the Trail.

Sat 21st July [Big Camp at Ashridge Estate](#)

(National Trust) *Ashridge nr Tring, Herts*

A chance to camp for one night at Ashridge with different family activities.

Sun 22nd July [Wilier White Road Classic Sportive](#)

Starting at Basildon Park, nr Reading, Berkshire

Discover the Italian-inspired ride around The Ridgeway.

Tues 31st July [Bug Hunt at Ashdown](#)

(National Trust) *Ashdown House, nr Newbury, Oxon*

Family fun with National Trust Rangers around Ashdown Woods.

Tues 7th Aug [Gentle Stroll - Hanging Coombe and Butterflies](#)

(National Trust) *Ashridge nr Tring, Herts*

Visit this less well-known area of the National Trust estate, to see the butterflies, learn more about the history and wildlife.

Sat 11th—Sun 12th Aug [Barbury Castle Endurance GB Ride](#)

Starting at Ogbourne St George, Wilts

The event no long distance horse rider wants to miss.

Tues 14 Aug [Kite flying & orienteering at White Horse Hill](#)

(National Trust) *Uffington, Oxon*

Family focussed: bring along your own kite.

Sat 25th—Sun 26th Aug [TRA Ridgeway Challenge 86](#)

Starting at Ivinghoe Beacon, Herts

Trail running event attracting athletes from around the world.

Sat 5th Sept [Chiltern 3 Peaks Challenge](#)

Starting at Princes Risborough, Bucks

Raise money for Rennie Grove Hospice Care by climbing Whiteleaf, Coombe Hill and Ivinghoe Beacon.

Sat 15th Sept [Beacons of the past launch event](#)

(Chilterns Conservation Board) *High Wycombe, Bucks*

A special event to bring Desborough Castle to life.

Sat 22nd Sept [Ridgeway Run](#)

Starting at Ashbury, Oxon

5km and 10km routes, plus a children's run for 6-13 year olds!

Get into Trail running!

Get motivated with these free regular runs on The Ridgeway:
Trust10 run around Avebury, Wiltshire on the fourth Sunday of every month April—Oct.
Park run (5km) at Tring Park, Hertfordshire, every Saturday.

A warm, local welcome

Local communities around The Ridgeway make a visit to the Trail unique. Visitors remember friendly or helpful people they meet on the Trail and appreciate the warm welcome, unique character and good quality of local B&Bs, pubs, shops and other businesses.

Local people are developing some great new initiatives along the Trail that promise benefits to both residents and visitors. This article sets out a few examples to show what can be done and to provide inspiration to others.

Living Ridgeway



Nuffield community centre project, Oxfordshire

Many Ridgeway visitors stop off at the old church in Nuffield, Oxfordshire, to enjoy a biscuit or cake. It is one of the few places in the area to get refreshments; there was once a pub in the village but this closed years ago.

In future, it is hoped the church will offer an even better welcome. Residents are fundraising for a project to adapt the interior of the church to provide a community space for events, club activities, coffee mornings and so on. Ridgeway visitors will be able to use a new toilet (accessible to disabled people and providing baby changing facilities) and a servery for light refreshments.

To donate towards the project, go to www.justgiving.com/crowdfunding/nuffield-community-centre-project. For more details, contact the Chair of Nuffield Parish Council, Gill Austin, and visit the parish council website.

*It is estimated that around 400,000 people live within 5 miles of The Ridgeway.
Imagine if each person donated £1 to the charity dedicated to its preservation....*



Friends of The Ridgeway

For as little as £8 per year for an individual, members know they are helping to preserve The Ridgeway year after year – go to www.ridgewayfriends.org.uk/join-us

A warm, local welcome

Wigginton Community Shop, Hertfordshire

Living Ridgeway

Wigginton is a village on The Ridgeway in Hertfordshire where the local community is currently setting up a new community shop. There is currently no shop in the village. This will become the third community shop along The Ridgeway; there is a shop in Avebury in Wiltshire and another in South Stoke in Oxfordshire. Other community shops a short distance from the Trail include Wilstone (Herts), Lacey Green (Bucks), Ewelme (Oxon), Brightwell-cum-Sotwell (Oxon) and East Hagbourne (Oxon).

According to research published by the Plunkett Foundation in 2017, there were 348 community run village shops across the UK in 2016 with a combined turnover of £54million, 1,114 paid jobs and thousands of volunteers. Community shops are proving to be a resilient form of business compared to UK small businesses nationally as very few close. It is thought it is because they engage community and stimulate social activity and community cohesion. More information can be found here: www.plunkett.co.uk/community-shops.



'The Wigginton village shop will be a place to have a natter, a cup of tea with friends, and make new ones; as well as a place to shop for staples and quality local produce'

To raise the funds needed to get the shop off the ground, the Wigginton initiative opened a 'share offer' to allow the community to buy a stake in the shop. Having exceeded their minimum target, the share offer closed in April this year with 174 investors totalling an incredible £81,550 on Crowdfunder (plus £68,000 match-funded by the Big Society Capital) and a further £3,100 invested offline. See here for details: www.wiggintonshop.org.uk.

'Once the Wigginton shop is running sustainably, it is intended that any profits will be ploughed back into community projects, making our village even more desirable', says Deborah Simcock from the Wigginton project. The shop will also support and champion local producers.

We are often asked for more benches, more water taps, more camping locations and more cafes/pubs/ refreshments on or very near the Trail. Could you or your community help fund or set these up? Email ridgeway@oxfordshire.gov.uk so we can work together to make it happen!

A warm, local welcome

Hale House B&B, Wendover, Buckinghamshire

A new, rather unique B&B is opening in August in Wendover, only a few minutes walk from The Ridgeway National Trail.



Owner Susanna Geoghegan worked with a specialist eco architect to design a new, energy-efficient house to replace an existing bungalow. The house, completed in February 2018, has since gained 'Passivhaus' accreditation for its 'eco-performance'. This award is contingent on high levels of insulation, triple glazing and almost total airtightness so that no heat is lost in the colder months whilst a mechanical ventilation and heat recovery system brings in a constant supply of fresh air. The house also benefits from PV (solar) panels and a rainwater harvesting system.

Wendover proved to be the ideal location for Susanna. She moved into the area because she wanted to live in the country but still have easy access to public transport, shops and a doctors surgery. Susanna continues to run a book publishing business alongside her new B&B venture.



It is great to see new accommodation opening along the Trail - it gives Trail visitors more choice. Hale House B&B offers beautiful views of Wendover Woods, breakfast in the garden, three comfortable double en suite rooms (one wheelchair accessible) and breakfast honey from Susanna's own bees! Guests can be collected and dropped off on the Trail and cycles can be stored too. For more details, see www.halehousebnb.co.uk

If your business is used by Ridgeway visitors, please list your business for free on our website

Living Ridgeway



Thank you and farewell to volunteer Sue Gill!

Sue joined us in 2015, volunteering one day a week. She has been doing the invaluable job of transferring reports of problems onto our mapping system. As a result, our record and understanding of problems along The Ridgeway is as up-to-date as it could ever be.

We wish her all the best for her move to the Lake District!

THANK YOU

The following event organisers recently donated towards Trail repair funds.

Moulsford School
(Ridgeway Rhino Cycle Ride)

Marlborough Running Club

View towards Avebury, credit Colin Drake



Latest News



Follow us on Twitter
@TheRidgeway1972

Download this newsletter and see
other news updates on our website

www.nationaltrail.co.uk/ridgeway/news

There's so much going on!

Join our mailing list to hear all about it..

Receive this free newsletter by email
four times a year. Email us to subscribe:

ridgeway@oxfordshire.gov.uk

If you would like to advertise or suggest articles for
future newsletters, please get in touch.



The Ridgeway NATIONAL TRAIL

Phone: 01865 810224

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Volunteer email: NTvolunteers@oxfordshire.gov.uk

Twitter @TheRidgeway1972

www.nationaltrail.co.uk/ridgeway/



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