

## Report of the Ridgeway Walk on Saturday, 11th May 2002 by Alan Smith

**ENTRIES** This year, 185 people entered the 40 mile walk, 165 started and 129 finished. The number of finishers was the highest since 1988 when 144 people successfully completed the walk. A large proportion of the starters (97) had not entered the walk before. Of these, 66 completed the walk. Several of the first time entrants were attempting this kind of walk for the first time. The fastest man was David Findel-Hawkins in 6 hours 20 minutes and fastest woman was Merrian Lancaster in 7 hours 41 minutes. Last person was Elizabeth Hey-Smith in 14 hours 59 minutes.

A few familiar faces were absent this year and I hope that the 'lost year' of 2001 does not mean they have found other things to do. The usual suspects turned up from Croydon YHA Group but it was disappointing to see no other YHA group represented, unless you count John Harding who, as a former member of Reading group was involved with the walk in the 1960s and 1970s. John and his team walked as 'Reading District YHA Reborn!', which will confuse Reading Outdoor Group as they thought they were Reading District YHA reborn!

The number of participants in the 20 mile walk was the highest since this walk started, with 41 starters and 36 finishers. The fastest man was Colin Noades in 5 hours 48 minutes and the fastest woman was Cindy Holbrook in 6 hours 43 minutes.

The separate 40 mile run attracted only three entrants and Mike Sandford believes that this event needs better marketing.

**PUBLICITY** I am grateful for the publicity given to the walk by the YHA, LDWA and South Eastern Rambler as well as the many establishments which displayed notices about the event. To supplement this publicity, I produced a leaflet which was widely available. This year, I am particularly grateful to the Goring Gap News which carried a half page spread in April about the walks and the run, and then followed it up in July with a report of what happened.

**WEATHER** Sunny, clear, with a breeze keeping the temperature down for some of the day: in short, virtually perfect!

**CONDITIONS UNDERFOOT** The state of the track has received publicity nationally though the campaign of the Friends of the Ridgeway to have non-essential motor vehicles banned from using the Ridgeway. The worst area was the stretch between The Shepherds Rest and Uffington Castle, described by walker Stephanie Smith as 'one of the most arduous stretches.....deeply rutted and difficult to negotiate in places'. Veteran Ridgeway Walkers are used to seeing ruts on the Ridgeway and their view was that, generally, the path was dry but with some give in it.

*[Note I heard recently from the Friends of the Ridgeway that Swindon Borough Council intends to apply a Temporary Regulation Order (TRO) to the part of the Ridgeway within its boundaries. The Council is taking this action because of the very bad state of the path between Fox Hill and Ridgeway Farm; the TRO will prohibit recreational vehicles from using that stretch of the path for up to 6 months. The Friends now hope to work with the Council to restore the surface.]*

**GLITCHES** Only one when the marshal of checkpoint 5 misread his instructions and set up his stall at checkpoint 6. Commenting on the situation, Linda Wright, one of the actual marshals assigned to checkpoint 6, said, "To think we might have set up our field hospital and tea bar oblivious of the fact that 50 yards on the other side of the road another watering hole was established - had it not been for the travellers who were parked exactly where we wanted to pitch, thereby forcing us to look elsewhere. I think that the walkers and runners would have found it amusing to have such prolific facilities. Surely the shortest distance between checkpoints in the history of challenge walking!"

Realising that he should have been five miles further west, checkpoint 5 marshal set off at speed to reach his proper location, arriving after all of the 20 milers and a handful of fast 40 milers had passed through. His co-marshal, who was relying on him to lead the way, missed a turning in the hot pursuit and continued driving west until, finally, he met up with Ian Mitchell of the Vanguards at The Shepherds Rest. Ian gave our wandering marshal directions which enabled him to get back to Streatley.

**REFRESHMENTS** This year, we provided orange segments at checkpoint 9 because we thought that, with only 3.5 miles to go to the finish, there wasn't sufficient time for bodies to absorb and benefit from biscuits and chocolate bars (these items were still available at checkpoint 8). Oranges have a reviving effect on flagging spirits though only half of the walkers seemed to have taken them up. Any views on the benefits of oranges, or on better alternatives, would be appreciated.

As our usual supplier of flapjacks (Safeways) has stopped producing them, Pam Deverill made her own supply for checkpoint 6. These went down rather well as did Linda Wright's ever popular bread pudding (supplied free of charge).

Mike Sandford (at Uffington Castle) and Mary and Mike Newland (at Gore Hill) also provided the food and drink at their respective checkpoints at their own expense.

**SHOCK, HORROR** David Young actually carried a waterproof this year. In view of the excellent weather, he probably thought it was a waste of effort. But, don't stop carrying it, David: our run of sunny weather can't last forever!

**EXHIBITION** A small display of photos from the 1962 to 1966 walks, together with some photos from recent years was put up on the hostel notice board.

**CEREMONY AT STREATLEY** On Sunday morning, we were privileged to have Norman Griffin, the original organiser of the walk, to present certificates to successful finishers. As most finishers had taken their certificates away with them on Saturday evening, the gathering on the front lawn of the hostel was rather select .

**CONGRATULATIONS** The following special awards were made: 20th crossing - plaque to Ken Saunders; 10th crossing - black badge to Keith Noble; 5th crossings - red badges to Douglas Aspinall, Gerald F Bateman, Colin John (5th crossing in 2000) and David P Wright; 2nd crossings - green badges to Mike Arnold, Mr Philip Bedford, David Burridge, Paul Caines, Vaughan Dennis, Susan Goddard, Susan Gunning, Chris Kippin, Ernst Klinker, Deanne Lead, Pete Naish, Connie Pflanz, William Sambrook, Martin Saunders, Mark Swain, Edmund Walters, and Sammy Wheeler.

**THANKS** to all the marshals, Nick Crivich, the warden of Streatley Youth Hostel and his assistants Kellie McClure and Eddie Blume and to St John Ambulance and Raynet for their support along the route.

**NEXT YEAR** I asked entrants, marshals and support services if they would still attend the walk if it was moved to the second Saturday after the May Day Bank Holiday. The intention was to avoid clashing dates with another walk. Opinion was almost evenly split amongst the walkers who replied to my survey, but St John Ambulance said they would have difficulty in covering the walk on the proposed new date. Key marshals also said they would not be available on the second Saturday as they had other long-standing commitments. I discussed the situation with the other walk and we concluded that neither walk impinges on the other and both were operating at or near their full capacities. In the circumstances, both walks have decided to leave their dates unchanged. Next year's Ridgeway Walk and run will, therefore be on **SATURDAY, 10th MAY 2003**

**DEATH OF A RETIRED MARSHAL** In 2000, when corresponding with Jill Smith, she told me that her husband, Richard, died on 25th April 1999 after a week's illness. Anyone who did the walks in 1989 or earlier will remember Richard and Jill Smith and the tea they dispensed from their caravan at Gore Hill. They had marshalled at Gore Hill for about 25 years and tea at their checkpoint (the only tea on the route) became a much appreciated institution. Many walkers will therefore join with me in sending our condolences to Jill and her family.

## LETTERS

'Now that the blisters are subsiding, I write to say how much I enjoyed Saturday's walk. A feature I relish is that it is a long distance walk - time is not even entered on my certificate.

I completed my first Three Forests Way (1982?) and was persuaded to join the LDWA by the assurance that 'to finish is to win', i.e. time was not primary. That was 60 miles in 30 hours - now 64 miles in 26 hours; so the police, cadets, scouts, guides, students and other 'outsiders' no longer enter. Therefore the Ridgeway challenge preserves the essence of the LDWA - to me it is the Real LDWA. The non competitive nature appears in the social and friendly atmosphere in the youth hostel and during the event.

Without you and your coach, checkpoint and finish marshals, long distance walking would be the poorer. So please pass on my gratitude to your helpers, with the hope they will keep on making this event so enjoyable for another 40 years -and my successors.'

**Gerald Bateman**

'Many thanks for organising last weekend's Ridgeway Walk. Please also pass on my thanks to the men and women who did such a good job manning the checkpoints'

**Peter Humphreys**

‘At last, I was able to complete my 10th Ridgeway Walk. Perfect weather, some excellent organisation anticipating everyone’s needs and even better and friendly checkpoints. So glad this special event was such a success for you. Many thanks to you all for the pleasure given. A special word of thanks to the couple who were dispensing tasty biscuits even in the days when there was no food on the walk. They say I look like the actor Terence Alexander (funny looking cove - of course!)’

**Keith Noble**

‘.....I should like to say a very grateful thanks to you and all your team. As a novice (and an older than average one at that) I faced the day with some trepidation - never having attempted such a distance before. With the support and encouragement of everyone on the checkpoints and the wonderful supply of goodies that kept body and soul together, it proved to be a great experience. Many thanks.’

**Stephanie Smith**

‘Carl and I were hoping, along with everybody else, for a memorable 40th anniversary of the Ridgeway Walk, but that everything should work out so perfectly on the day was a tribute to the hard work and expertise of the marshals and yourself.

I know the provision of liquid has to be your main concern, but we appreciate the work behind the range of titbits that now appear on the walk. We enjoyed them all as usual, and they were a great fillip to our progress. If we could just single out one, it would be the oranges, which were especially juicy and seemingly pip-less! And even the weather played its part. fine with a cool breeze, it was ideal for the walkers and even some of the marshals we spoke to, agreed it wasn’t a bad day for mounting their vigils and rushing around the countryside with goods and people.

Two other events particularly delighted us this year. The arrival of five youngsters (*Charlbury Challenge Beaters*) at 10 p.m. was like a breath of fresh air and, hopefully, a happy portent for the future perhaps. Then Norman Griffin’s presence on the Sunday just rounded things off perfectly, not only for the presentation on the lawn as of yore, but also that he was able to join us for coffee at The Swan.

Speaking personally, I too often feel a sense of anticlimax after the Ridgeway even on the Sunday, but this year there was just a warm glow lasting about a week and then normal life resumed.

Our thanks also to the warden and helpers who played their part in making it such a memorable weekend and to St John and Raynet for their steady support. We appreciate the vast amount of time and effort you spend in organising the Ridgeway (more than ever this year) and would like to make a special mention of the support from the Vanguard’s.’

**Ken Royce (and Carl Roe)**

‘Thank you for another brilliantly organised walk. Also the catering was great. I didn’t use the packed lunch I brought with me and didn’t take more than my fair share of the goodies on offer either. All the helpers were very supportive which is good for morale and there seemed to be more checkpoints serving tea than before which I very much appreciated. I was very pleased to finish this year because at 75 I didn’t know if I could still do it.

**Ken Styan**

‘Just a quick line to say “thank you” for all your hard work to make the Ridgeway Walk such a very enjoyable event! The organisation was excellent and I’m certain that the careful planning was a big contributing factor to my success in completing the event. I wasn’t sure that I’d manage the whole course; now, of course, I’m keen to do it again, but faster. ....Anyway, no blisters and I’m contacting the LDWA for details of similar events! I think I’ve got the bug!’

**Helen Thurman**

**AND NOW**, a report from a runner’s perspective - **Barry Dabrowski** reports on the Ridgeway 40

‘I’d been looking forward to this event for several weeks, as my venture into ultra-distance running, and was a little disappointed when Joe Fell’s recent flu and chest problems resulted in his pulling out.

The finish was a few miles from where I was brought up, so it was home territory. The race was poorly advertised in running circles, and the date had been moved a week from the RRC/Ultra Handbook, but it is a popular walking event. When I arrived at Overton Hill at 9:45, the only person there was Mike Sandford, the race organiser, who told me that about 160 walker had set off between 8 and 8:30, and 2 runners has set off at 9:25. Nobody else appeared before 10, so I started alone at 10:01 !

I had my check points worked out for 9 minute miling, with the objective of finishing inside 6 hours, and I was even more determined, when Mike told me that his best was 6:01.

I hit my first check point (4.3 miles gently uphill into a breeze) exactly, then gained a couple of minutes in the next 5 miles, as it was mostly downhill. Crossing the A346, I then walked up most of Whitefield Hill – the only steep hill on the route, and soon after caught and passed some walkers. The gentle undulations of Liddington Hill, with lots of walkers in sight, and splendid views followed, then a drop down to CP3 and a bridge over the M4. One third distance gone, one minute up on schedule – now there was only an undulating marathon over rutted tracked to go !!

A short section of road passed the only pub on route, then the Ridgeway climbed up onto the ridge, where a broad rutted track runs for 24 miles with big views to the north for most of the way. Mike was at the 19.7 mile check point (where the 20 mile walk starts) which I reached in 2:50:32 (about 6 minutes up on schedule), and he told me that I had gained over 10 minutes on the other two runners. The track then runs along the back of Whitehorse Hill, where we used to go on primary school trips, and soon there are views of Wantage and Didcot Power Station, along this most lovely and open section. Around 25 miles, I passed Barbara, the only lady runner, who had slowed to walking and jogging. At 26.7 miles, the A338, I was 10 minutes up on my 4 hour target, so my marathon time was about 3:46. At 28.5 miles, I passed a monument which was part of the course in my first ever competitive win - North Berks Schools in 1967. From about 30 miles I could see a dark figure on the horizon, and I was closing on him. Matt was at CP7 (32.4) having a cup of tea when I got there, so I had a quick cup of tea, and we ran together for the next 5 miles, helping each other. I was now starting to struggle, so the company made it easier. The last check point was about 3.5 miles from the finish, and at 5:27, I was worried that I'd dropped to 10 minute miling. The last 3 miles was downhill, so I was soon striding out at about 8:00 miling, determined to get inside 6 hours, and very pleased that my legs were going well again. On the road into Streatley I had to throw myself into a thorn bush to avoid a car on a dangerous section of road. When I did reach the Youth Hostel (finish), there was nothing there but a board with "Check In in Annexe" written on it – up a flight of steps after running 40 miles. I burst into the annexe announcing my arrival, and stopping my watch at 5:56:38. Matt arrived 5 minutes later.

Mike arrived from check point duty, and told me that several of the 8 am walkers were actually runners – the first man to finish had taken 6 hrs 20, so he didn't walk much, and there were really 7 or 8 runners and not 3.

With a bit of marketing, and a few minor improvements, this could be a super ultra-distance race, and I hope it succeeds in future years. I certainly enjoyed it."

## MARSHALS

Coach	Abigail and John Elrick, Ken Fancett, Carl Roe and Ken Royce
Start at Overton Hill	Ken Brooks, Derek Smith, Alan Smith (Walk); Mike Sandford (Run)
CP1 Burderop Down	Tim Ardill, Derek Smith
CP2 Whitefield Hill	Angela and Brian Bellwood
CP3 Liddington Crossroads	Malcolm and Pat Cox, Veronica Hope
CP4 Uffington Castle	Keith Rix, Mike Sandford, Lesley Secker and Derek Smith
Ridgeway 20 start	Christine Cogger and Ron Cutler
CP5 Eastmanton Down	Chris Hayward and Angela Bellwood
CP6 Yew Down	Pam and Steve Deverill and Linda Wright
CP7 Gore Hill	Mary and Mike Newland
CP8 Compton Down	Emma Haile and Alex Heap (to 18.00); Helen and Stuart Walker (18.00 to finish)
CP9 Starveall Turn	Ray Stagles (to 17.00), Tom Stagles (to 20.00) Norman Willis (17.00 to 20.00); Dave Dare (20.00 to finish)
Finish	Christine Cogger, Ron Cutler, Christine Lord, Andy Mansfield, Phil Noel, Keith Rix, Lesley Secker and Peter Smith.
Certificates	Christine Cogger, Alan Smith
Roving/fold up marshals	Ken Brooks, Nick Lamb, Alan Smith and (until 18.00) Helen and Stuart Walker
Transport for retired walkers	Nick Lamb was on hand throughout the day for this job as were Brian Bellwood and Veronica Hope after their CPs closed down. Malcolm Cox, Chris Hayward and Mike Sandford also gave lifts to retired walkers after their CPs closed. Ken Brooks also collected a walker from the A338
'Wandering marshal'	Bob Spicer



