

Report of the Ridgeway Walk on Saturday, 10th May 2003 by Alan Smith

ENTRIES This year. 151 people entered the 40 mile walk: 134 started and 102 finished. Peter Peggie was a non-starter at Overton Hill but joined the walk at Uffington Castle and completed the last 20 miles. At least four dogs took part in the walk (see separate article on dogs).

The first man to finish was Ken Fancett in 6h 29in and the first woman to finish was Deanne Macbeth in 9h 46rn. The last finisher was Christine Joseph in 14h 19m. On Sunday morning, Christine told me that she had thought the walk was a two day event. She had entered at the last minute and, as the booking form for YH accommodation and meals provided for lunches to be ordered for both Saturday and Sunday, she had assumed that it was a two day hike. Kate Jayne, who finished in 14h 12m also entered fairly late and ordered a lunch for Sunday, may also have thought the walk was over two days.

Alan Hackett, who was on his first Ridgeway Walk, was misdirected by someone at Barbury Castle onto the official Ridgeway National Trail and did an extra three miles through Ogbourne St George to Whitefield hill. Nevertheless, he still managed to finish in 9h 4m.

The number of retirements looks high but is in line with the proportion of retirements in recent years. However, not all retirements are due to exhaustion/painful blisters etc. Trevor Powell, who completed the walk in 2002, planned to retire at Uffington Castle so that he could drive to Wolverhampton to see the football match between Reading and Wolves. And Magnus Taylor got lost in the last few miles and accepted a lift to Streatley, forfeiting his right to a certificate. (Note: John Syfret also went wrong in this section but found his way to the finish on foot.)

One runner entered the 40 mile run (read her experiences in the letters section).

The 20 mile walk had 40 starters. All but one finished. The first man home was Roy Philpott in 3h 52m and the first woman to finish was Janet Brawn in 4h 21m. Five walkers were the last finishers in 8h 19m.

TIMINGS The first coach arrived at Overton Hill at 07.52 and the second at 07.53. I have adjusted the start times of walkers on these coaches to 07.57 and 07.58 respectively.

WEATHER After a cool but sunny start, it soon clouded over and the cold wind strengthened during the day. The majority of walkers described the conditions as ideal: marshals thought otherwise! Veronica Hope at CP 3 commented "The clouds were gathering threateningly from the west, and the breeze was getting colder, so we thankfully donned extra layers, including Ian (Mitchell) who had bravely put on shorts. As an extra precaution, we'd set up the table close, and parallel to my car as a windbreak, and put all the spare food, bin bags etc inside, to try and avoid a wetting. This seemed to 'appease the fates' nicely: the blacker clouds passed by, and poor old Swindon seemed to get the downpour instead! However, it remained 'so bracing' throughout our shift." Linda Wright at CP 6 said, "They say it's tough at the top, and it certainly was up there on the Ridgeway. We had the most remarkable day — and we weren't even walking! This could be the lament of all those who volunteered on May 10th. Speaking of her co marshal, Steve Deverill, she said "He had the unenviable task of sitting outside the tea tent with a clipboard, checking people through. This year he very wisely eschewed the shorts in favour of trousers and still felt cold. It was one of those grey days with a chilly wind — any cooler and we could have had the odd case of mild hypothermia on our hands (probably Steve)." Had Linda's remarks been made at the time of the walk, they would have been regarded as prophetic. I had visited each CP as fold up marshal, which involves standing around at every location. By the time I left CP 7, my stomach was feeling queasy and I had started shivering even when in shelter out of the wind. The prospect of standing around in the cold for several more hours was unappealing. I made the wise decision to hand over my job to Helen and Stuart Walker and returned to Streatley for resuscitation. The drive back in a very warm car followed by a bowl of the hostel's really excellent soup, soon put me right.

Dave and Sheila Dowsett at CP 8 had great difficulty in putting up their fishing tent in a gale and remarked that it was very very cold.

The marshals at CP 6 decided to finish off their day by visiting CPs 7, 8 and 9. Pam Deverill said, "It was a real eye opener driving to the last three CPs. We were frozen and had only spent a couple of moments at each!" It was so cold there that they offered bread pudding to the Raynet man and the marshals at CP 9. Ray Stagles who marshalled earlier in the afternoon at CP 9 said that at one stage he and his co-marshal thought they would need their supply of survival blankets themselves.

CONDITIONS UNDERFOOT Less than ideal. The result of the preceding long dry period was a hard, blister-inducing surface. Many entrants, and even a few other passers by, commented on the poor state of the path, which has lost much of its grass cover and is badly rutted. This situation has been brought about by the use of off road motorbikes, quad bikes and 4x4 vehicles. The Friends of the Ridgeway is an organisation campaigning to have non-essential motor vehicles banned from the

Ridgeway. To join the Friends email the Membership Secretary at FRmembers@aol. com requesting a membership application form, or write to Janet Heirons, 34 Oxford Street, Ramsbury. Wilts, SN8 2PS giving your name and address.

NOTABLE EVENTS

Anne Klinker, on the 20 mile walk, fell over, broke a finger and sustained bruising elsewhere. At CP 6. she received first aid from St John Ambulance and carried on walking to finish in 5h 33m.

Tim Gravina completed the 40 mile walk quickly as he was playing in an orchestra that evening (see letters).

Colin Saunders caused some consternation to me when I heard that he left his coach marshal instructions in the Catherine Wheel on the Friday night. Ian Mitchell and Keith Rix had to run after him to his lodgings at The Miller of Mansfield to return them to him. I wondered if I had chosen the right man for the job. I need not have worried: Colin carried out his duties impeccably on the morning of the walk and entertained the passengers with his opening remarks of “Welcome to the Wallace Arnold tour of Normandy and the Channel Islands. I’m Colin your courier and this is Keith your driver (*true- AS*). We should reach Southampton by 9 o’clock”: to which one walker called out, “Oh dear, I’ve forgotten my passport.”

A toilet (the loo with the view!) was provided at CP 6. ‘Donated’ by Dave and Linda Wright, it was originally intended for use by the marshals only (secluded bushes are some way off from the CP location). But big-hearted Pam Deverill made it available for any lady walkers who needed it. Gentlemen were excluded on the basis that it’s easier for them to find relief in the countryside than it is for the ladies and there were many more of them. The provision of a loo gave plenty of opportunity for Pam, Linda Wright and their many friends involved in the walk to indulge in ‘toilet humour’ both before, during and after the event!

Greater love hath no marshal than that she give up her track suit bottoms for a walker. For the second occasion, Pam Deverill lent her track suit bottoms to a walker who found walking in shorts was leading to too much exposure in the cold conditions. By chance, she got this garment back quite quickly when she called in at the hostel just to see how things were going. But, after warming up in The Bull later, she left her anorak there!

CONGRATULATIONS The following special awards were made: 5th crossings - red badge to David Morgan; 2nd crossings - green badges to Christina Attwood, Melvina Bickham, Martin Bingle, Nick Bubb, Peter Darnell, Jono Dennis, David Foster, Vicki Hamilton, Fabian Ironside, Sui Kuet, Marta Janiskova, John Leather, Jean-Jacques Morcrette, Gordon Patterson, Deb Stephens, Jim Strugnell, John Syfret, Andrew Taylor and Ms Helen Thurman.

As a separate matter, Pete Clegg’s crossing was the 300th completed by members of the Vanguard Rambling Club, which presented him with a special certificate designed by Dave Wright to mark the occasion.

THANKS to all the marshals (who not only gave their time but, in several cases have made no claims on Ridgeway Walk funds for expenses), Nick Crivich, the warden of Streatley Youth Hostel and his assistants Jan and Nick Hillier, and St John Ambulance and Raynet for their support along the route. If any volunteer has not been mentioned in the list of marshal, particularly amongst those helping at the hostel, please accept my apologies.

EMAIL ADDRESSES Now that I have an email address (jungledrums@waitrose.com) I can communicate much more quickly and easily with walkers on the Ridgeway Walk mailing list. I would be grateful if readers of this report will notify me of any changes in their email addresses or, if they don’t have an email address at present, let me know if they acquire one.

RETIREMENT OF TWO STALWART MARSHALS

Mike and Mary Newland have decided that, after marshalling on the Ridgeway Walk since 1962, it is time to call it a day. During their association with the walk, they have marshalled at several different locations including Uffington Castle. Rats Hill and Eastmanton Down and, when the walk could be done in either direction between Streatley and Marlborough hostels, Mike transferred walkers’ rucksacks from one hostel to the other. When Richard and Jill Smith, who had provided tea and rock cakes at Gore Hill, retired after the 1989 walk, Mike and Mary stepped into the breach and continued to provide tea and home-made cakes or biscuits at that checkpoint. From 1990 to 1996. Gore Hill was the only checkpoint providing any food or a hot drink.

In 2000, Charlie Pritchard, my predecessor, presented Mike and Mary with a paperweight carrying the White Horse logo to mark their long service. Mike and Mary are the last of the original Reading District YHA Group to help on the walk: they will be missed by their many friends amongst the regular Ridgeway Walkers and, as an organiser, I will miss having a marshal team so experienced that, to turn up and do their job. all they needed to know was the date of the walk. We wish them well in their ‘retirement’.

MARSHALS

Coach	Carl Roe and Ken Royce, Colin Saunders
Start at Overton Hill	Ken Brooks, Derek Smith, and Alan Smith (Walk): Mike Sandford (Run)
CP 1 Burderop Down	Anne and Tim Ardill, Ken Brooks and Derek Smith
CP2 Whitefield Hill	Angela and Brian Bellwood
CP3 Liddington Crossroads	Malcolm Cox, Veronica Hope, Ian Mitchell and Pat Watts
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 Jackie
CP6 Yew Down	Pam and Steve Deverill, Ian Mitchell and Linda Wright
CP7 Gore Hill	Mary and Mike Newland
CP8 Compton Down	Dave and Sheila Dowsett (to 18.00): Emma Haile and Alex Heap (18.00 to finish)
CP9 Starveall Turn	Ray Stagles (to 17.00), Richard Killick (mid afternoon to finish), Chris Eley (17.00 to finish);
Finish	Christine Cogger, Ron Cutler, Julian Langdon, Andy Mansfield, Phil Noel, Louise Radice, Keith Rix and Lesley Secker
Certificates	Christine Cogger and Alan Smith
Roving/fold up marshals	Ken Brooks (to 18.00), Alan Smith (to 20.00) and Helen and Stuart Walker.
Transport for retired walkers	Brian Bellwood and Veronica Hope after their CPs closed down. Malcolm Cox also gave lifts to retired walkers after CP 3 closed, as did Ken Brooks.

LETTERS

Very many thanks for all your efforts re the Ridgeway Walk. We thought the organisation was good, Youth Hostel friendly and your supervision on the day was a nice touch. I am always tremendously impressed by the generosity of the checkpoint people. I was amazed to find some medical support. We enjoyed our first 40 and will be doing some more."

Caroline Easterbrooke and Mike Tutchell

"Just a quickie to say a big thank you to you and all the team who made Saturday so enjoyable and so well organised. The transport, the marshalling, the refreshments and the atmosphere were all excellent, even the weather held up! Please also pass on my personal thanks (*yes! I've done that. AS*) to Rob the St John's chap who patched up my feet at the halfway stage, exactly as he had to do last year. My feet seem to be able to cope well with running but fall apart when I walk (?)"

For the record, if it was you manning the table at the end (*No, it wasn't me. AS*) I was the bespectacled and "out of breath" chap to whom you offered the oxygen cylinder! Deanne and I had run the last few miles to make it back by 17.45 and thus beat our time from last year (she'd blamed my feet for it being over 10hrs). I hope this wasn't perceived to be in the wrong spirit (*It wasn't! AS*) but we were only competing against ourselves — if you'd seen our London Marathon times you'd know we aren't very competitive."

Nick Bubb and Deanne Macbeth

"Just a brief note to say thanks again for the superb organisation of this year's Ridgeway. The ground must have been the hardest ever!"

Geoff Dumper

"I am the Flautist and I did the 40 miles (not 20 miles as you assumed)! And yes. I did have an excellent concert in Westbury that evening (which is why I had to walk/run at a reasonable speed!). Thanks for an excellent event and also allowing me to change afterwards in the Youth Hostel. Many thanks to all the marshals."

Tim Gravina

"Dear Alan and team/ A short note thanking you for your effort and time put in organising the Ridgeway event, for the early checkpoints letting me through before official opening time, for the fantastic facilities at CP 6 (tea especially), for the tea and biscuits at CP 7, and for the friendliness and help at the finish (I really suffered!), the presence of St John Ambulance and the staff at the Youth hostel who were so helpful. Please pass on my thanks and congratulations. Good walking."

John Leather

"Dear Alan! It was good to meet you at the Ridgeway Walk. Many thanks to you and your team for all your efforts. I thought the arrangements were admirable. As for the Youth Hostel — it is 40 years or more since I was last in one but it was excellent. I shall take the opportunity soon to walk the rest of the Ridgeway in 2/3 days."

John Mountain

“Last year, near the monument, I had a lovely view of a red kite. with the sun showing off its plumage wonderfully. This year. with grey skies, cool wind and squally showers there was little sign of any interesting wildlife, although larks were singing just as loudly. In spite of the rather low temperatures, the people running the checkpoints were as warm as ever, and a delightful fillip for the next leg. The people at CP 9 were, maybe, trying to be just a little too kind when they told me that it was about a mile and a half to the finish; my GPS showed it as three and a half and that was as the crow flies! I’m very grateful to you, the checkpoint staff and all the other behind-the-scenes people who made it yet another splendid crossing. Of course, I shall be back next year, then the one after that I shall get my free pint!”

Peter Naish

“Just thanking you and all the marshals (I suppose that includes me!) for all your hard work in organising another fine Ridgeway Walk. The only comment/request/suggestion I would make is for bananas instead of (or as well as) oranges, maybe halfway at Uffington Castle, moving on any left over to a later CP. They’re a great energy booster and seem to be very popular at other walks I’ve marshalled on.

As an aside for your report if you wish, which I may have mentioned yesterday (11/5). As I was going to wear fairly heavy boots for the first time on the Ridgeway, I decided to ease the burden by taking a five minute rest approximately every hour. and I generally stuck to this plan. It seemed to work, although with my slowest ever time. Despite feeling a bit stiff after restarting, this soon wore off and I was comfortably into a good stride again, looking forward to the next rest. The only time I missed one, I hit the proverbial wall soon after CP 8.”

Colin Saunders

“Mike, Many, many thanks for your help in getting me to the start and thereby letting me take part in this year’s event. The only disappointment was that there was nobody else going off at the 10 O’clock start. I thoroughly enjoyed it though my ageing ankles did find it a bit hard and rutted underfoot which slowed me even further — but it gave me more time to enjoy the views — especially the rain lace curtains in the distance which never came nearer! Many thanks again and I will definitely add this one to the calendar of what enjoyable long training runs to do!”

Hilary Walker

(Note: For Hilary the Ridgeway 40 was a training run before a 100km run in Switzerland!)

[I emailed walkers and marshals on this year’s walk to clarify a few points and gather any anecdotes they might have for inclusion in this report. Many who responded said they ‘d had an uneventful walk, but they took the opportunity to thank me for organisation of the event. It was not my intention to elicit more letters of praise, indeed it would be almost refreshing to hear from ‘disgusted of Tunbridge Wells’—surely we must have done something wrong which got up someone ‘s nose. I acknowledge responses from Doug Aspinall, Pete Clegg, Sue Clements, Ken Fancett, Stuart Fletcher, John Guyon, Richard Hotchkis, Christine Joseph, David Morgan, Peter Servante, Juanita Solera and Deb Stephens.]

TALES OF DOGS ON THE RIDGEWAY WALK

Since publication of last year’s special report, more information has come to light about the Labrador type dog which did the walk of its own volition in 1964. The dog was brought back to Streatley by the Croydon YHA group team in their old ambulance ‘Snowdrop’. Contrary to what I said in the history section of the 2002 report, the dog was not returned to its owners: nobody knew where the dog had come from so it had the certificate attached to its collar and was let loose to find its own way back home.

Graham Holt, a member of Reading YHA group in the 1960s suggested to me that it would be interesting identify the owner who might throw some light on whether the dog made a habit of disappearing on long walks. The Goring Gap News published the story and asked if anyone knew about the dog. The newsprint was hardly dry before Mrs Fisher of Streatley contacted the paper. Apparently the dog had either forgotten where it lived or didn’t want to go home as it was found wandering around by special constable Frank Holmes who lived near The Bull. The dog was not claimed and, after seven days, it was offered to Mrs Fisher and her husband. They named the dog Prince.

Although he may not have embarked on another walk as long as 40 miles, he certainly walked round his local neighbourhood. He regularly negotiated the cross roads at The Bull and turned up at Thames Bank, a prestigious house with a river frontage, where the staff fed him, and at Colebrooks, the butchers, in Goring High Street. Prince collapsed and died in the woods above The Coombe in Streatley in 1971 and is buried in Mrs Fisher’s garden.

I understand that Mrs Fisher’s first contact with Goring Gap News was quite emotional so Prince must have been a much loved pet.

Stories of dogs completing the walk prompted David Morgan to mention that his LabradorX, Charlie, completed the walk with him in 10 hours 5 minutes in 1996. Charlie was not mentioned amongst the finishers and did not receive a certificate. I was

pleased to present David with a 1996 certificate for Charlie at this year's event. Charlie is 13 years old now so is probably happy to let David's one year old dog, Merlin, a German short haired pointer, strive for the canine laurels. Merlin completed his first crossing with David in 1h 36m but this may not have been much of a strain for him as he had done the Wye Forest 56 mile route the previous weekend!

Jennifer and Richard Dean brought their two Border terriers with them and they completed the walk in 12h 27m.

Stuart Fletcher writes, "I was walking my 4th Ridgeway with Colin John. My wife dropped Abbey, our Schnauzer off at the 28 mile CP so she could join in the last 12 miles. It's nice to have four fresh legs joining the team at that stage. Four fresh legs are also what Colin and myself are crying out for at that stage."

There was at least one other dog on the walk, a small spaniel possibly called Mo. I haven't identified precisely who owned the dog but I know it was happy to retire at 23 miles (collected by a private support vehicle).

Pete Clegg writes that he "was very impressed with the dogs taking part, especially the two Border terriers. It should be possible to calculate how many strides they took to complete their walk. Possible variables to use in the calculation could include:

- 1 only say 8 inches long so length of stride may be say 8 inches;
- 2 Two legs are needed per stride, dogs have 4 legs:
- 3 Dogs probably cover at least 50% more distance than normal walkers (assuming Ridgeway Walkers are normal people!)"

Pete suggests this is a project for Dave Wright of the Vanguard's to work on, but concludes that he is glad he is not a dog!

Not satisfied?

John Guyon's reaction at the finish on being given his certificate was "What? All that way just for this?"