

Report of the Ridgeway Walk on Saturday 7th May 2005 by Alan Smith

The letters page, together with John Leather's account of his personal experiences give a good idea of what this year's Ridgeway Walk was like. Blustery wind, behind the walkers for most of the way, a handful of short, sharp showers, two of hail on top of the Ridgeway, quite a lot of sun though cool. The contrast between conditions underfoot in 2004 and 2005 could hardly have been sharper. The 2004 Ridgeway Walk was, possibly the muddiest on record but this year, the surface was dry and some of the badly rutted areas had been smoothed out. The improved surface was due to a drier winter than usual and the fact that non essential motor vehicles had been banned from using the Ridgeway in Wiltshire and West Berkshire and on some parts of the Oxfordshire Ridgeway between 1 October 2004 and 30 April this year.

The first of the three coaches arrived at the start at 07.51 and both the second and third coached arrived at 07.55. I have adjusted the starting times for walkers on the first coach to 07.56 and 08.00 for the walkers on the other coaches, apart from those who asked on the day for their exact times of departure to be recorded. This broad-brush approach cuts down on the administration at the start, allowing walkers to set off as soon as they disembark from their coaches.

Finishing times were generally faster this year than in 2004. Some walkers cut minutes off their times, some half an hour or more while Malcolm Green cut over three hours off his! Times were so fast this year that marshals at checkpoint 9 (36.5 mile) were amazed when they found they were able to close down shortly after 21.00.

At checkpoint 9, Mike Sandford and Alan Smith in their fluorescent jackets stood round a lamp as it became dark to provide a visible sign for later walkers as they drew near. "What a welcome," said Ray Taylor as he approached. "You've overtaken more people!" said Stuart Walker who had seen Ray come through checkpoints 7 and 8. "Yes. It wasn't easy but the girls sat down," replied Ray (the girls being Catherine Hingley and Rosie Orr who proved to be the last walkers to finish in 14 hours 24 minutes).

Marshals had some problems with their tents. Erecting them proved difficult in the windy conditions, particularly at checkpoints 6 and 7. At checkpoint 6, disaster struck when a table loaded with provisions for early arrivals blew over and an awning collapsed. The main tent was severely buffeted until that too almost collapsed before further guy ropes were attached to it.

In the 40 mile walk, there were 172 entrants, 148 starters and 121 finished. Ken Fancett recorded the fastest time of 6 hours 21 minutes. Tizzy Mann, the youngest entrant this year at age 14, completed the route in 12 hours 7 minutes and is right to be proud of her achievement.

The Ridgeway 40 running race had the largest entry to date, with 15 starters and 13 finishers. The first gentleman home was Nigel Jenkins in 5 hours 46 minutes and the first lady to finish was Ramona Thevenet-Smith in 6 hours 41 minutes

The 20 mile walk, the Ridgeway 20, also had the largest entry ever with 85 starters and 81 finishers. The youngest to complete the course was 8 year old Laura Swain.

Thanks to all volunteers, who took on a great variety of tasks including baking bread pudding and flapjacks; making sandwiches; erecting tents; providing a toilet and disposing of contents thereof; driving retired entrants to Streatley; driving marshals to their posts; making and serving cold drinks and tea; serving food; putting up, and taking down, waymarks; delivering water where needed; noting the arrival of walkers and runners at checkpoints; putting up notices and placards at Streatley hostel; and dealing with hostel bookings. I also acknowledge help from some of the volunteers, mainly from the Vanguard, in mailing details of the walk to past entrants. And Dave Wright of the Vanguard provided the illustrations in this report. Dave's picture of Checkpoint 1 on the front cover is based on a photo taken by me. The picture on the back cover is also mine. This year, Stuart Walker took over the organisation of the marshalling. I am very grateful to him for taking on this job, which has eased my burden of organisation considerably.

The thanks of us all go to Nick Crivich and his staff at Streatley Youth Hostel who have gone out of their way to help make the Ridgeway Walks and Run the successes that they undoubtedly are. Thanks too to St John Ambulance for turning out to deal with any medical problems and to Raynet for providing communication along the route which helped so much to keep track of the walkers and runners. I am also grateful to Paul Windle, the landlord of The

Shepherds Rest for letting us use the pub car park for checkpoint 3 and for opening the public bar toilets ahead of his opening time for the benefit of early walkers and runners.

Colin Saunders, in his letter, raises two questions – the amount of space in the annexe at Streatley hostel and the question of awards. I will have to put my thinking cap on in respect of both questions. The problem of space in the annexe may be insoluble but the question of awards has taxed my brain for some time. However, what has bothered me most is the award of badges for 2, 5 and 10 crossings which do not seem to be appropriate trophies in this day and age.

However, pending the introduction of any new awards, I have issued 17 green badges (for 2 crossings) And 5 red badges (for 5 crossings). A plaque has been awarded to Bill Colson to mark his 20th crossing and a clock has been awarded to Graham butler for his 30th crossing. Dave Young is also due an award for his 30th crossing but says he doesn't want a clock. I have yet to work out what would be an appropriate trophy in lieu of a clock.

Ken Royce was very ill a week after the Ridgeway Walk but, after a spell in hospital seems to be making a good recovery. We hope that he will return to full health very soon.

MARSHALS

Coach	Ken Royce, Colin Saunders and Dave Young
Start at Overton Hill	Ken Brooks and Alan Smith (Walk); Mike Sandford (Run)
CP1 Burderop Down	Anne and Tim Ardill, Ken Brooks and Alan Smith
CP2 Whitefield Hill	Angela and Brian Bellwood
CP3 Shepherds Rest	Malcolm Cox, Walter Cullis, Veronica Hope and Derek Smith
CP4 Uffington Castle	Mike Acott and Ian Mitchell (part of time), Keith Rix, Mike Sandford (part of time) and Lesley Secker
Ridgeway 20 start	Christine Cogger and Ron Cutler
CP5 Eastmanton Down	Mike Acott (part of time), Chris Hayward, Jackie, and Ian Mitchell (part of time)
CP6 Yew Down	Pam and Steve Deverill, Emma Haile (part of time) and Linda Wright
CP7 Bury Down	Sheila and Dave Dowsett, Emma Haile, Keith Rix, Derek Smith, Helen and Stuart Walker (all for part of time)
CP8 Compton Down	Sue Arnold and Peter Dziwior
CP9 Starveall Turn	Mike Acott, Douglas Chester, Andy Mansfield, Mike Sandford and Helen Walker (all for part of time)
Finish	Liz Brenke, Ian Briggs, Vanessa Brown, Anne Chadwick, Christine Cogger, Walter Cullis, Ron Cutler, Sarah Feneck, Christine Lord, Andy Mansfield, Lesley Secker, Xamantha Seeman and Peter Smith
Certificates	Christine Cogger and Alan Smith
Fold up marshals	Ken Brooks (to 18.00), Alan Smith and (from 18.00) Stuart Walker
Roving Marshals	(1) Mike Acott with Ian Mitchell (2) Stuart Walker
Transport for retired walkers	Brian Bellwood, Chris Hayward, Veronica Hope and Keith

[Food for CP 4 delivered to Streatley was transported to the CP by Mike Acott. Mike Sandford erected warning signs to motorists on the A346 before sending the runners off: he took the notices down later in the morning.]

OBITUARIES

Harold Mann - I'm sorry to report the death of Harold Mann in November 2004 at the age of 84. Harold made his first crossing of the Ridgeway in 1975 and returned to make 16 more successful attempts. The last occasion he did the walk was in 1994 when he retired. In 1977, he commented in a letter to the then organiser, Norman Griffin, that 'although it is the only long distance event I go in for, I am sure there is a Ridgeway spirit which you have all helped to create and which keeps us coming back for more'.

For a couple of years in the 1970s, he walked for the YHA Sailing Club (or Group?) and has also walked for the West London Ramblers and under the LDWA Kent banner. In one year, he entered himself as the only representative of the Faversham Tramps and in another year as the sole walker for the Short Distance Walkers! But, for most years, he walked as an Independent. From 1995, Harold marshalled on the walk but had to give up after 2000 when he suffered a stroke.

The 1984 report announced that he was setting up arrangements for walkers aged over 60 who completed the 40 mile walk to have a free pint at The Catherine Wheel. Harold's friends, Ken Royce and Carl Roe now finance the Harold Mann Ridgeway Pint.

Our sympathies go out to Harold's family.

Chris Morey - I have recently heard from Dave Young that Chris Morey, a former member of Croydon YHA Group, who did the Ridgeway Walk in 1968 and 1970, has died at the age of 59.

In 1968, Chris completed the walk in 11 hours 27 minutes and he was the 29th walker home. In 1970, Chris was the first walker to finish, recording a time of 7 hours 11 minutes.

Chris, who had settled in New Zealand, intended to celebrate his 60th birthday by entering the Tanners Marathon with his wife, Robyn, on a return visit to his country of birth. Sadly, this was prevented by his untimely death, but Robyn and their son, Colin, have decided to take part in this year's Tanners as a tribute to Chris.

Our sympathies go out to them both.

Alan Melsom - Another loss to long distance walking in 2005 was Alan Melsom, who was born at Claygate, Surrey, in 1935 and pursued a life-long love of walking and youth hostelling.

He took part in the first Ridgeway Walk in 1962 and entered each subsequent year until 1968, returning for a final crossing in 1974.

In the 1967 Ridgeway Report, organiser Norman Griffin recorded: "In the early hours of Sunday morning, the wardens were awakened by Alan Melsom, who was in great pain with cramp. Taken to Battle Hospital, he had his leg encased in plaster. We've since heard that he is now free of plaster and entered Tanners successfully". In fact, Alan eventually completed a total of 36 Tanners - an achievement that few have matched - and was the first recipient of the Alan Blatchford Memorial Trophy in 1981.

Our sympathies go out to his widow, Gerry, and their children, Jonathan and Jacqueline.

Trevor Davis - A local paper in Aldbourne carried an obituary of Trevor Davis who died on 22 February last at the age of 73. Trevor, who used to live in Aldbourne, ran for the Aldbourne Road Runners and recorded 15 crossings of the Ridgeway, the last one being in 2000. Although Trevor moved to Wales, he continued to represent the Aldbourne Road Runners in the Ridgeway Walk.

Our sympathies go out to Trevor's family.

One walker's account of The Ridgeway 2005

Another Ridgeway has come and gone. Some stay in the mind more than others. This year, as far as I was concerned it was an "epic" as I had to pull out "all the stops" to enable me to finish. Normally, I am very lucky as I only usually suffer from the use of muscles I never knew I had (the course being only slightly undulating compared with the mountains and hills I usually train over).

Late November of last year, I was assaulted on the Malverns (ironically, a place that I used to go to for safety and peace!). I suffered a fractured cheekbone, some permanent nerve damage on the left side of my face, massive bruising and I'm lucky to be able to see out of my left eye. I spent several days in Worcester Royal infirmary not knowing very much! Coupled with things not being too good at home and having had a very bad virus the week before, I was very ill-prepared.

Feeling and knowing that I was non-infectious on Thursday, I travelled down to Streatley on Friday – it was a cool but sunny day. An okay night at the Youth Hostel leading to an early awakening, then coach journey saw me at the start along with many others. As soon as I started, I knew that things were not right and so I decided to set a target of running to Uffington Castle, then seeing how I felt. This I managed but found the wind rather energy sapping between checkpoints 2 and 3. On arrival at Uffington, I knew that I had nothing left "in the tank" to carry on running and that it was going to be a walk/jog in the second 20 miles.

I didn't really know much about the second 20 miles other than there was a thing called a wind continually on the nape of my neck, and there were very kind, efficient people (angels in disguise) at various points tending to my "empty tank" feeling and mentally making it worthwhile to carry on. What a relief to reach Checkpoint 9 when I managed to jog to the finish (a) because it was downhill and (b) I was out of the wind! At long last, I saw this building called Streatley Youth Hostel, went in, put my card on the table and went straight out again to get my head and thoughts together (I had had a headache from checkpoint 6 (on and off – more on than off) and loosen up. After this, I just lay in the sun, out of the wind by the cycle shed, and "died" for awhile (I'm sure everyone has experienced this at some time in their life).

I finally staggered back into the annexe, told everyone I was in the "land of the living" and slowly disappeared into the Youth Hostel where I slowly made myself a large mug of tea and went to my bunk where I slowly sipped my tea, had some rich biscuits to settle my stomach and whilst listening to West Bromwich Albion v Manchester United, drifted into oblivion.

Summing up, my heartfelt thanks go to Alan and his "team" (even more this year) for all their hard work, help etc which enabled me to finish this year's event; the St John Ambulance brigade, who were very consoling at the end, they give their time voluntarily on so many events; Raynet who do such a sterling job in ensuring competitors' safety and last, but not least, Nick and the assistant wardens at the Youth Hostel who provide meals at all times, keep the hostel clean and give one all the help they can. I'm sure that all the other walkers and runners will echo my thanks. It was good to see so many old friends and I apologise for not talking but it still hurts to talk (effect of the virus).

I must congratulate the people who have successfully completed many Ridgeway crossings. I admire them and also what sums up so much of this organisation (which needs to carry on), the eight year old girl who, with her mother, successfully completed the 20 mile walk. Well done!

John Leather

LETTERS

"I did enjoy the walk, particularly the views as well as the challenge. The almost ideal weather made all the difference! I also found it very well organised, particularly the bus arrangements which turned out to be very reliable with the minimum of hassle and faffing around. The trouble taken over the various refreshments was also much appreciated.

I did not know I was the only entrant from the area though I did know that this year I was the only one from the Goring Gap Health Walkers (it's thanks to their more challenging off-road walks and advice from other walkers, that I became fit and confident enough even to think of doing all or part of the Ridgeway)."

Helen R Abbott

"I want to send my thanks to all who helped on the Ridgeway Walk and made it such an enjoyable event – helped by luck with the weather.

The trouble you take in additional attractions should be especially mentioned – the list of those taking part, league tables of completions and photographs. They are all much appreciated and help to make the day more memorable. Marshalling – particularly at late checkpoints – can be tiresome, but the volunteers' efforts are not forgotten."

Gerald Bateman

"Just thanking you and all the marshals and helper for all your hard work in organising another great walk. Those lovely ladies at CP 6 will be remembered for ever for their wonderful tea and cakes at that time the best bread pudding and tea ever. This was my second Ridgeway Walk and I am certainly looking forward to my third. This year, I did the walk for Sponsorship on memory of Robin Antonowicz, a 23 year old local footballer from Goring who was tragically killed in a car accident recently. Robin was well known locally; he played football for Wallingford and Oxford City and the local South Stoke teams. Robin's parents wished any donations to go to charities KEEN (Kids enjoy exercise now) and PDSA. I am very pleased to say that I managed to raise £440 to be divided between these charities. Many thanks once again."

John Beardsley

"Thanks for the excellent organisation. I managed to finish in 9.49 and Dave (Wright of the Vanguards) finished two minutes in front, he started earlier he only managed 9.57 ((9.52 officially) in spite of all the running he claimed to have done. He didn't see me catch him up coming into Streatley. Suffering this morning with a very badly bruised left toe which I managed to stub twice towards the end while trying to keep pressure off the two small right toes which had been giving me trouble before the event."

Butler

Graham

"Alan, thank you very much to you and all your marshals for organising the 2005 Ridgeway 40 event. My fiancée and I completed it for the first time in 2004 in the most horrendous muddy conditions; we gained many blisters and conquered something which was almost beyond comprehension. We both swore that we would never do such an event again. But with time, the blisters subside and you are able to walk again and by the time the next event came round we were mad keen to send off our entry forms. This year, we even persuaded four friends of ours to complete the event; they all managed to complete the distance but some were off to the chemists again today to top up on painkillers. Looking forward to next year already."

Jason Burke

"Just a card to say thank you for the wonderful organising of the Ridgeway Walk – I know how hard it must be to get a large event to run like clockwork – you left absolutely nothing to chance. Thank you for keeping me safe. Thank you for taking me down to the railway station. The train was four minutes late so, with the help of your lift, I managed to stagger on to the Reading train rather than Twyford and three buses to Paddington! The whole day has been memorable for the kindness from strangers – without whom I should never have finished the walk!"

Jen Cowan

"Thanks for all your superb organisation as always. We (*Snowholers team*) were rather pleased with our time this year. Getting quicker as we get older."

Jono Dennis

"Just a brief note to thank you again for the usual excellent arrangements, as usual, for this year's Ridgeway Walk. I managed even to sleep better this year on the Friday evening – not so much snoring in a 4-bedded room!! At the rate we're going, the "Harold Mann pint" will have to be awarded to all those UNDER sixty who finish it (the Ridgeway) – there will be less of those (!!) compared to those over sixty!! Again, thanks for the organisation this year and hope to see you in 2006."

Geoff Dumper

"We (*Rosie Orr and Catherine Hingley*) really enjoyed the walk, and, yes, I mean enjoyed! I think it must be the mix of pain and giggles brought about by tiredness! Certainly one of the highlights of my year. We are very grateful to you for all the work you put in and for the sunny weather that somebody managed to arrange this year."

Catherine Hingley

"Hope all went reasonably well after I left Streatley at about 6.30, i.e. not too many walkers in difficulties of whatever kind. Speaking for myself, it was a great day, and I now even know exactly where CPs 8 and 9 are as well (with apologies to anyone impatient at my initial ignorance!)"

Veronica Hope (volunteer)

“Alan and “the team”I know you did so much hard work and organising the event is such a mammoth

task – well done and thanks to you all.....Take care, have a rest, you all deserve it.”

John

Leather

“Just to say thank you for organising the walk. We had a very enjoyable day and thought that the organisation was wonderful. Please pass on our thanks to all volunteers who provided sustenance and encouragement at all checkpoints. They were all wonderful.

My 14 year old daughter wonders if she was the youngest to complete it? I thought her stamina was amazing!”*

Catherine Mann

* *Tizzy Mann was the youngest walker to complete the 40 mile walk this year.*

“Dear Ron, A big thank you from three happy walker. We all very much enjoyed the walk yesterday – helped by gorgeous weather for walking! – and would like you to pass on a very big thank you to you for organising it and to all the helpers who provided very welcome drinks and food along the way.”

Val Mowlem (on the 20 mile route)

“I really enjoyed the day which was well organised.”

Alan Pearson

“Many thanks to you and the remarkable band of helpers, for yet another impeccably organised day. With so much potential for things to go awry, I am amazed every year to see how watertight and problem-free the arrangements are. The walking conditions can never reach the organiser’s heights of perfection, but after last year, anything was going to feel wonderful! As soon as I heard the larks singing at the start, I knew this was going to be a good one; it was dry underfoot and the dark cloud that threatened the beginning was quickly carried away on that strong wind. If one had to find fault, it would be that the wind was a little too strong, and that the sharp shower of hail at about 23 miles was unpleasant. I was certainly less than amused when the hail returned with redoubled vigour five miles later! Never mind, that’s all in a day’s walking, and the checkpoint folk were splendid. It’s a strange description for such a solid concoction, but that bread pudding really lends wings to one’s stride!

I reached Streatley in a personal best time, and to crown it all this was the year I came of age! I qualified for the Harold Mann pint (many thanks to Ken Royce and Carl Roe) and very nicely it went down too.

Once again, Alan, sincere thanks for making it all happen.”

Peter Naish

“Congratulations and thanks very much for organising another successful Ridgeway – I think I enjoyed it! I have a few comments; I expect you’ve heard them before.

Is there any chance of finding more space than the classroom at the hostel? The check-in, catering, Raynet and St John people seemed to take up at least two thirds of the room, leaving cramped space for walkers. I found it rather uncomfortable with nothing to put my cup of tea and plate of food on.

Re awards. David Young’s proposal for a lump of engraved flint was interesting, but I wonder whether it would be right to change the system? Those who have already received their clock may think they would rather have had a flint. I would be happy with a clock, assuming I managed to finish next year. Also, I feel there should be an award for 35 times, and 40 with Dave W fast approaching that, if your funds can stand it.”

Colin Saunders

THE RIDGEWAY WALK - TEAM LEAGUE TABLE 2005

Team Name	Successful Crossings	Years Entered
Vanguards Rambling Club	308	39
C.O.P.S.E. (Croydon YHA Group)	218	40
Hendon Hammers	120	23
Northampton Phoenix	116	34
West London Ramblers	114	37
Blewbury Local Ramblers	105	28
The 7th Ramblers	53	10
Aldbourn Road Runners	50	16
Abingdon Amblers AC	49	15
Thames Valley LDWA	48	16
LDWA Mercia	44	18