

Report of The 59th RIDGEWAY WALK held on 7th August 2021 by Alan Smith



The Bull and the sealed off B4009

(photo: Alan Smith)

Introduction - This is an unofficial report written for my satisfaction. A copy can be supplied to anyone who hears about it and wants one.

The Walk is organised by the Ridgeway 40 Walk Association. I am now a marshal, though I also maintain the records of the number of crossings each entrant has done as well as the Individual League Table. I do not have an overall view of the walk and this report may be somewhat limited in scope.

The 59th Ridgeway Walk should have been held on Saturday, 9th May 2020. But, in 2020, the Covid 19 (a coronavirus) pandemic was sweeping through the country which had been put in lockdown for three months from the 23rd March. This meant that travel was restricted, people were urged to stay at home, only going out briefly for daily exercise or for essential purposes, and gatherings of unrelated people in homes or elsewhere forbidden.

Bookings for the 2020 Walk had been received as usual from the end of 2019 but were stopped in the middle of March when it became clear that all challenge walks as well as other walks or rambles would not be taking place. Although restrictions were relaxed in the summer of 2020, further lockdowns were imposed later in the year as new variants of Covid 19 appeared and the number of infections and deaths continued.

In 2021, the Ridgeway 40 Association hoped to be able to organise the walk though it was not possible to arrange the walk for the traditional date as the country was in lockdown again. But, there were hopes that restrictions would be lifted in the early summer and it was proposed to hold the walk on the 7th August if there was enough support from volunteers to marshal the event. That support was forthcoming.

People who had entered the walk in 2020 were given the option of remaining on the list for 2021 or withdrawing with a refund.

The choice of the 7th August for the Walk was probably influenced by the fact that the times of sunrise and sunset were similar to those on the 8th May, the day the Walk would have taken place but for the pandemic. But, the new date being in the holiday season, presented some problems for marshals travelling from afar in getting accommodation.

Entrants – 228 Entrants; 120 starters; Finishers 113.

The fastest man was Lee Plank in 6 hrs 58 mins. The fastest woman was Sam Kelly in 8 hrs 2 mins. The last walkers were Nikoleta Theodorou and Oliver Thorp in 14 hrs 35 mins.

For the second time, walkers were issued with computer chip cards (also known as tracking tags) which were scanned by specially adapted mobile phones; the phones recorded arrival times at checkpoints and transmitted the information electronically to headquarters. This is a magnificent system but it can only work with the information which the phones capture. At first sight, the results show that the fastest man was Tommy Brooks at 4 hrs 39 mins followed by Matthew

Rose in 6 hrs 29 minutes and the fastest woman Cas Wright in 7 hrs. However, in each of these three cases, their start times and the times they arrived at checkpoint (CP) 1 are not recorded so the completion times are the times they took to walk from CP2 at 14½ miles to the finish. In these circumstances, I have taken the record of walkers for whom full information is recorded.

The Results – The list of starters with their split times and finishing times can be found at www.ridgeway40.co.uk

Weather – The weather on the 8th May was wet. It looked as though the weather on the 7th August would be no better. In the days running up to the 7th August, a low pressure system settled over the country and widespread showers, with rumbles of thunder and strong winds were forecast for the day of the Walk.

As a marshal, I wasn't looking forward to the event and pictured myself at best standing at a checkpoint in the pouring rain and at worst standing at a checkpoint in the pouring rain with thunder and lightning round me. The forecast may well be the reason for so many non-starters. As it turned out, there were few showers on the walk, some were missed by the walkers and those they did experience were said to be refreshing by some entrants. There was a following wind so the rain which did come was on the walkers' backs. Also, it was not too hot.

Conditions underfoot were surprisingly good bearing in mind all the rain we had had in the run up to the Walk, though being summer, vegetation had grown up and some paths in the Barbury Castle area were narrower than they would have been in May.

Notable walkers – Patricia Seabrook completed her 12th crossing and, at 81, appears to be the oldest walker to have completed the walk, the previous oldest walker being Derek Savage at 80 whose last crossing was in 2012.

The last walkers were part of group of six from Cambridge, the others being Elizabeth Curtis, Ben Mullaney, Chris Mullaney and Gemma Palmer-Dighton. All of these walkers may have been new to challenge walking. One of them informed me that one of their number had been 40 last year but, because of Covid restrictions, hadn't been able to celebrate his birthday with his friends. So, they looked around for an event with '40' in the title and lighted on the Ridgeway 40. The woman who told me this said that she hadn't done anything like this before and to prepare herself, went for a 15 mile walk few weeks before the event. All six kept together; I saw them coming in last at CP2 and CP 6 where they arrived a few minutes before the time they would have been compulsorily retired.

Two women walked with their dogs, a large brown called Doug and a sheepdog called Rosie but the dogs did not receive certificates.

Covid 19 – The decision to re-schedule the walk to the 7th August was taken at the beginning of February and the website mentioned special arrangements to ensure the event was Covid secure. By August, some of the restrictions such as wearing mask in certain venues or on transport, had been lifted but the arrangements for the Ridgeway Walk as announced in February remained in force.

The start at Avebury was conducted in the open. Tracking tags were to be fixed to rucksacks or clothing with a length of string which entrants had to bring with them so that scanning could be easily done at a distance. Some walkers circumvented this by removing tags from the strings and handing them the marshals or tying them up closely to their rucksacks so that marshals had to get close to them to do the scanning. The website said that limited food would be available and drink would be supplied in disposable cups. Filling water bottles direct from CP containers was not allowed. There would be no transport for retired walkers who had to make their own arrangements to be taken off the course.

The finish was not at Goring village hall. Originally, the Association intended to have the finish in a marquee on the front lawn of Streatley Youth Hostel. YHA headquarters insisted that the Association ensure that entrants staying at the hostel were accommodated in their bubbles and would not allow the lawn to be used for the finish unless the whole hostel was booked. With only 15 entrants wanting accommodation (and, apparently the hostel wasn't accepting bookings from individuals) the cost of using the lawn as the finish was prohibitive so arrangements were made with The Bull to have the finish in their car park.



Patricia Seabrook at CP6 (photo: Alan Smith)

Other features peculiar to the 2021 Ridgeway Walk –EMC were unavailable, presumably because they were busy giving Covid vaccinations. CPs were given details of local hospitals in case of emergencies but, fortunately, there were none. Raynet were also not present, the phone system for keeping track of walkers making their role superfluous.

The 20 mile walk was not held.

The Bull – Shortly before the Walk, a large vehicle collided with the pub on the side by the B4009. The B road was blocked off at The Bull so a 13 mile detour had to be made to reach the pub car park by road for anyone approaching from the south, north or east. According to the landlord, who had been at the pub for three years, this was the third occasion the pub had been hit. The blocking of the B4009 must have had a bad effect on The Bull's trade and one hopes that the pub got some custom from Ridgeway Walk finishers.

Marshalling – With only 120 starters and no 20 mile walk, the experience of marshals must have been similar to those of marshals in many of the early Walks. CP2 was busy for about 2½hours with all the field having passed through by 13.02. But, at CP6, for instance, there were long periods when no one appeared and, apart from two groups of walkers who kept together, walkers arrived in ones and twos.

At Streatley, Colin Saunders was stationed outside The Bull to direct walkers up the path between the pub and its accommodation block to the finish in the car park. Many arrivals were running and Colin ran up the slope with them on 40 occasions.



Tommy Brooks at CP2 with marshals Veronica Hope and Helen Walker (Photo: Alan Smith)

Marshals

Ridgeway 40 Start Point: Avebury Sports & Social Club - Paul Hopkins, Roger and Sandra Pounder, Clive Frankham, Bruce Barclay, Steve Carver and Alan Voyce

On closure, Paul and Alan went to CP4, Bruce assisted at CP3, Steve Carver and Sandra/Roger went to CP1. Clive went to Barbury Castle to direct walkers onto the correct route (direction arrows were placed at Barbury Castle car park showing route diversion from Ridgeway).

Checkpoint 1 Whitefield Hill - Ann & Tim Ardill, Steve Carver, Roger and Sandra Pounder

Road-warning signs were erected on A346 on both sides of the track entrance where the CP was located.

Checkpoint 2 Fox Hill, Ridgeway Path car park - Veronica Hope, Alan Smith, Stuart & Helen Walker

On closure, Veronica drove Alan to Starveall Farm where he walked to CP6; she then went to the finish in case there was any ferrying to be done. Stuart & Helen went to assist CP5.

Checkpoint 3 Uffington Castle - Richard Hotchkiss, Olwyn Rowlands, Bruce Barclay and Malcolm Cox

Checkpoint 4 Yew Down - Wendy & David Bagshaw, Alan Voyce, Janette Armstrong and Paul Hopkins

Road-warning signs were erected on both sides of road junctions B4494 and A33.

Checkpoint 5 Compton Down crossroad - Frances Passey, Leila el Kettas, Jon Bateman, Stuart & Helen Walker

Checkpoint 6 Starveall Turn - Jan Pearson, David & Lesley Secker, Keith Rix* and Alan Smith

**Keith had a horrendous journey by road (road works?) and arrived at the CP between 16.00 and 17.00. As it was clear that there was nothing for him to do, he soon departed.*

Finish The Bull Inn, Reading Road, Streatley - Trevor Brown, Ron Cutler Norma Williams, Colin Saunders and Andrew Mansfield

- Food**
- CP1 - Ann & Tim Ardill provided biscuits, crisps & peanuts.
 - CP2 - Alan Smith provided dried fruit.
 - CP3 - Prepared snacks sourced by Richard Hotchkiss.
 - CP4 - Cakes and savoury snacks provided by Janette Armstrong.
 - CP5 - Chocolate bars and surpluses from earlier CPs.
 - CP6 - Refreshments included fruit (apples, bananas and pears), caramel and granola bars, sweets.
- Water and squash were provided at all CPs together with apple and orange juice at CP6.

The website stated that food provision would be limited but, in fact, the food provided was very good. Unfortunately, what with the statement in the website and 45 % of the expected entrants not turning up there was, inevitably, a huge surplus of food. Some food from checkpoint 4 was distributed to other CPs, though in respect of CP2, this resulted in a smaller take up of dried fruit. At CP6, a huge amount and variety of food was offered on the basis that there would be no food at the end as the premises of The Bull were being used. But most walkers didn't want to take anything. Walker David Yearsley said, "I was ready for nothing!" (was he the walker who filled his rucksack up with food anticipating limited provision by the organisers?). Many walkers said that it was not far from the end or, "No, I won't bother". They were unfazed by Jan's warning that there was no food at the end. One walker said he was well fed. "On us, I hope?" I asked. "Yes" he replied. The fruit juice (particularly the apple) went down well at CP6.



Marshals David and Lesley Secker and Jan Pearson await the arrival of walkers at CP6 (Photo: Alan Smith)

Facilities - Mobile toilets were provided at CPs 2, 4 and 5.



The finish in the car park of The Bull, Streatley

(Photo: Unknown)

Return to sender. Eventually! - On the 18th May last, I received back from the Post Office a letter marked 'addressee unknown'. I had posted the letter to a Ridgeway walker in 2008 (the postmark was 30th July 2008) and it enclosed checkcards and cloth badges for the addressee and her daughter. Later that morning, I read in the Metro that lost mail recovered from a former postman's home had finally been delivered – 13 years late. The letters were to homes in Grove and Wantage (where my letter had been sent).

I contacted by phone the person to whom I had sent the checkcards and badges to get her new address and forwarded the cards and badges to her.

The Individual League Table - It has been my policy to remove from table walkers who have died. With new names coming into the list, I did not want the table to become unwieldy and when I pruned the list in 1997 to remove walkers who hadn't done the Walk for many years, I was thanked by a veteran walker whose long deceased friend had appeared in the table year after year.

But, recently, some top names in the list have died and everyone I've spoken to has expressed disgust that I have removed, or intended to remove, them. I have, therefore reinstated/kept names of deceased walkers with the letter 'D' after their names. How long they remain on the list is a matter for the future. Interestingly, this year, no names have been added to the table since walkers who might have made their fifth crossing were non-starters.

THE RIDGEWAY WALK INDIVIDUAL LEAGUE TABLE 2021 (Includes crossings on dates other than the traditional Ridgeway Walk dates.)					
		John Beardsley	11	Ian Anderson	6
		Richard Haynes	11	Axel Bonet	6
		Veronika Brazdova	11	Paul Caines	6
		Sue Leonard	11	Bob Emmerson	6
		Simon Plint	11	David Hall	6
		Mike Sandford	11	Derek Harman	6
Dave Wright	50	Elizabeth Bertram	10	Toby Harris	6
Geoffrey Dumper	47	Barrie Dannenberg D	!0	John Hobbs	6
David Young	43	Peter Darnell	10	Rebecca Lawrence	6
Bob McGavin	39	John Harrison	10	Pip Lloyd	6
Ken Royce D	38	Alan Iwi	10	Anthony Maplesden	6
Graham Butler D	37	Peter Johnson	10	David Morgan	6
Colin Saunders	36	Catherine Mann	10	Don Newman	6
Pete Clegg	35	Ian Mitchell	10	Linda Pan	6
Neil Lawrence	34	Norman Smith	10	Wendy Sandford	6
Christopher Cambray	32	Tom Stagles	10	Scott Sawyer	6
Carl Roe D	31	Edmund Walters	10	Lesley Secker	6
Abigail Elrick	27	James Whittaker	10	Annabel Sutherland	6
John Elrick	27	Douglas Aspinall	9	Helen Thurman	6
Ken Fancett	25	Matthew Crocker	9	Stephen Turner	6
Alan Smith	25	Ian Davis	9	Tim Adams	5
Mike Kershaw	23	David Hoben	9	Robert Attwood	5
Alan Palmer	23	Gisela Hoppe	9	Gianpaolo Balsamo	5
Ken Saunders	23	Brian Layton	9	Jenny Boyle	5
Bill Colson	22	Jeff Ware	9	Patrick Breydin	5
Colin John	22	Philip Bedford	8	Andy Cuss	5
Ernie North	21	Bradley Bright	8	Emily Danaee	5
David Sheldrake	21	J Comber	8	Peter A Edwards	5
Derek Smith D	21	Vinney Connelly	8	Stuart Fletcher	5
John Rollinson	20	Jono Dennis	8	Roz Fullylove	5
Susan Clements	19	Simon Enright	8	Maxwell Hadley	5
Steve Rackett	18	Trevor Powell	8	Emma Halford	5
Martin Bingle	17	Keith Warman	8	Jamie Halford	5
Michael Clarke D	17	Roger Wilson	8	Anthony Hammond	5
John Harding	16	David P Wright	8	Jason Harrison	5
Helen Rosamund Abbott	15	Ernie Boehm	7	Emily Hickson	5
Gerry McEvilly	15	Fiona Cameron	7	Chris Johnson	5
Mike Cambray	14	David Cleverley	7	Alistair Lawry	5
Walter Cullis D	14	Vaughan Dennis	7	Richard Long	5
Marta Janiskova	14	Hugh Dickerson	7	Chris Merry	5
Dr Francis L Thomason	14	Susan Goddard	7	Michael J Middleton	5
Ian Campbell	13	Susan Gunning	7	Robert Myers	5
Malcolm T W Green	13	John Leather D	7	Paul Norman	5
Andrew McMinn	13	Marlena Kniestedt	7	Peter O'Donoghue	5
Peter Naish	13	Deanne Macbeth	7	Keith Rix	5
Nicholas Syfret	13	Connie Pflanz D	7	Tim Smee	5
Linda Wright	13	David Powell	7	Ian Smith	5
Gerald Bateman	12	Graham Sarah	7	Joanne Turner	5
Nigel Hickson	12	Peter Servante	7	Kathy Tytler	5
Patricia Seabrook	12	Christopher Smith	7	Stephen Watson	5
Dan Unwin	12	Richard Spraggett	7		
Victoria Morris	12	Rita Williams	7		

Obituaries

Derek Smith, a veteran Ridgeway Walker and marshal died on the 11th March 2021 aged 91 after a fall at home.

Derek entered the Ridgeway Walk 22 times between 1974 and 1997 and successfully completed 21 of them. His fastest time was 10 hrs 23mins in 1993 and his slowest time was 12 hrs 35 mins in 1974 (the first year he entered). He retired in 1984.

In the years 1998 to 2005 and 2007 to 2015, he marshalled at various checkpoints, though for five of the last years he marshalled at Starveall Turn (except 2012 when he was at the finish).

Derek took part in many other challenge walk including some of the early LDWA 100 and the Nijmegen four day marches. He always finished these and often remarked that his secret was to walk at an even pace throughout the event often overtaking participants who had passed him early on.

He was probably in his 70s when he took up running and completed around six London marathons. When running got too much for him, he marshalled for his running club and took up Nordic walking. He was still walking within a few months of his death and kept up with 'younger' members of the Vanguard's Rambling club on day rambles with no trouble.

Derek was a humble man of few words. But while he was not a pushy character, he certainly pushed himself physically.



*Derek at Streatley YH, 1999
(Photo: Alan Smith)*

Carl Roe was another veteran Ridgeway Walker and marshal. He died on 25th March 2021 aged 83. He is credited with 31 crossings, his fastest time being 10 hrs 19 mins in 1975 and his slowest time was 13 hrs 41 mins in 2004. He retired from the walk on four occasions in 1988, 1992, 2006 and 2007



*Carl at CP4 Uffington Castle in 2008
(Photo: Alan Smith)*

For a couple of the early years, he was part of the Rockhoppers team but most times he walked as a West London Rambler.

Carl always walked with his good friend Ken Royce and the two of them always stopped for a meal at The Shepherds Rest pub at Fox Hill. The pub was 14½ miles into the Walk which many might think was too early for a substantial meal. But, it seemed to work for Carl and Ken except on one occasion in 1988 when Carl was sick after the pub stop and had to retire. He had eaten a meat pie and drank a pint of Flowers beer and he thought that the beer was off.

Dave Young made his first crossing in 1969 when the waymarking of the Ridgeway was not very good. He recalls that towards the end of the Walk where there was a myriad of tracks, Carl called out to him that he was going up a wrong track. This contact was the beginning of a lifelong friendship.

After 2007, Carl helped out marshalling from 2008 to 2019 (except for years 2009 and 2011). He marshalled at several different checkpoints but, from 2013, he marshalled at Starveall Turn.

Carl always had his camera handy and he supplied me with photos for the walks I was connected with since 1997

Starveall Turn is the 36½mile checkpoint and the last checkpoint before the finish.

Starveall Turn is, perhaps the toughest place to marshal. The position is a bit exposed and the checkpoint is open longer than any other checkpoint on the route, opening at 13.30 and closing at 21.15 though the closing time depends on how long they have to wait for the last walker! These opening/closing times do not take account of the time spent getting the checkpoint ready and clearing up afterwards.

Access is via a track from Starveall Farm. The track is rutted and bumpy and driving along it can be unnerving, particularly in the dark.

When I organised the walk between 1997 and 2012, I found it hard to get people prepared to be at the checkpoint all the time but Carl and Derek along with a few other stalwarts took on the whole job. It's remarkable that the toughest checkpoint ended up being run by 70 and 80 year olds, with a couple of striplings in their 60s forming part of the team.

In addition, I understand that the Starveall checkpoint team, which stayed in Streatley overnight, helped the organisers set up the finish on the morning of the walk. So Carl, Derek and their team mates had quite a long day!



Sun going down on a perfect Ridgeway Walk – view from CP6

(Photo: Jan Pearson)