

THE 40th RIDGEWAY WALK

organised by **READING YHA & OUTDOOR GROUP**

SATURDAY 6 MAY 2000

At the end of April, I heard that it was very muddy on the Ridgeway. This was not surprising since April was extremely wet, apparently the wettest since records began in 1829! But, given a chance, the Ridgeway generally drains well and a week or more of fine weather before the walk resulted in most of the surface becoming dry and very hard. Isolated thunder storms were forecast for Southern England on 6 May. None occurred on the Ridgeway, though thunder may have been heard mid-morning and lightning (with no thunder) was seen to the south by walkers on the last few miles after dark. After a misty and slightly chilly start, the sun soon broke through. A breeze kept the temperature tolerable at first but this dropped by the end of the morning and it became very warm.

Entries this year struggled to reach the large number in 1999 (perhaps last year's weather put some people off) and the number of non-starters, 35, was higher than usual. In contrast, the percentage of retirements was lower than it was in 1998 and 1999. Out of 180 entrants, 144 started from Overton Hill and 117 completed the walk. Harold Gray, who missed the coach because he had problems with his car decided to walk from Streatley to White Horse Hill and back. But he turned back at the 23 mile CP on learning that the marshals at White Horse Hill could not wait for him. It was already past the CP's closing time when we heard he was at Eastmanton Down and everyone had other duties they had to go to.

In previous years, the coaches left about 7.00 and arrived after 8.00 at the start: this year, they all arrived before 8.00. **The times of the coaches were: 1st and 2nd coaches 7.50; 3rd coach 7.57: start times have been adjusted to 7.53 for those on the first two coaches, unless you specifically asked a marshal to record your start time at Overton Hill.** The whole field was away very quickly and were so fast that the first three CPs were able to close down before their respective closing times. Thereafter, the pace of the final walkers began to slow.

We had some excitement in the afternoon when we thought two walkers had gone missing in a stretch of the walk in which it seemed impossible to get lost. Raynet scoured the Ridgeway in their four wheel drive vehicle but returned empty handed. But there was a fault with our paperwork: the walkers had retired at a CP and been driven back to Streatley. Still, some good came out of it as Raynet found a sheep caught up in some fencing and were able to release it.

CP6 (28 miles) was, again, a place where the majority of retirements took place. Amongst these was David Threlfall who, early in the walk, had fallen down without apparently sustaining any injury. But, later in the day, he found one of his legs very painful. He had fallen on his mobile phone in a trouser pocket which resulted in some bruising. The phone was undamaged! So, here is clear proof that mobile phones can damage your health - and remember, you heard it here first.

Three walkers arrived at CP7 (34.5 miles) just after 8.00. They should have been asked to retire but I allowed them to go on. Marshals at the next CP thought they should have been retired but they also allowed them to continue as they appeared reasonably fit on the basis that the last CP and the ambulance would be withdrawn (they had two sweepers, Dave Dare and Derek Smith, with them). They reached Streatley after midnight, which is reminiscent of the early days of the walk when the rules were even more relaxed than they are now. I admire the determination of these walkers, but the position was not entirely satisfactory and next year we may have to enforce retirement at Gore Hill if walkers do not arrive there by 800pm.

No records were broken. Ken Fancett was the first walker home in 6h.48m, though out of the five runners in the Ridgeway 40 (the 40 mile running race, Shane Gudgeon and Ros Priday shared first place at 6h.35m and Tony Summers returned in 6h 52m. The first woman home was Clare Matthews in 7h 01m. John Dryden (1977) and Linda Finch (1997) still hold the records for the fastest completions of 5h 03m and 6h 29m respectively: the record for the last person is held by a 1966 walker with a time of 17h 03m.

Bob McGavin was awarded a plaque to mark his 20th crossing and the following badges were awarded: black (10 crossings) to Sue Clements and Abigail and John Elrick; red (5 crossings) to Ian Campbell and Michael Middleton (5th crossing in 1999), green (2 crossings) to Chris Hayward, Monika Macgeorge, Peter Servante, B R Dannenberg, Gerry McEville, Peter Hield, George Baugh, Phil Noel, Robert Attwood, Richard Plumley, Clare Matthews, Joe Whitehead-Nudd. Gary Chapman, Steve Williams, Stuart Fletcher, Roger Butterfield and Stephen Shelswell. Congratulations!

Two unexpected awards were made to Tim Ardill and Mike and Mary Newland. These volunteers have marshalled on the walk for over 30 years and Charlie Pritchard, the previous walk organiser drove out to CP1 and CP7 to present them with paperweights incorporating the White Horse logo. On arriving at CP 1, Charlie saw Tim besieged by walkers from all sides and immediately lent a hand. Thanks, Charlie!

All 19 starters completed the 20 mile walk from White Horse Hill to Streatley.

Thanks to Nick, Liz and John at Streatley hostel for their co-operation in accommodating the special needs of this event and for coping so well with the weekend, to St John Ambulance for their medical services and to Raynet for providing our main communications throughout the day. Thanks are also due to Linda Wright for providing some of her much admired bread pudding for CP6 and to Harold Mann for the "Ridgeway Pint". I am grateful to Graham Butler for the loan of his mobile phone and for bearing the cost of the calls I made on it, to Dave Wright for designing the cover; and also to Cohn Saunders who, although unable to enter the walk, arranged for emergency rain capes to be supplied by Save the Children Fund, though none of our minimally attired walkers wanted any!

The amount of praise I have received for the organisation of the walk is almost embarrassing. But, however good the organisation, the event could not take place in its present form without the time and effort put in by marshals and other helpers who deserve our thanks.

What may not be evident is that several marshals provided food at their CPs themselves at their own expense. Mike Sandford provided the sandwiches (aided by his family the night before) and the rice pudding and bananas at CP4; Mike and Mary Newland supplied the tea and cakes at CP7, as they have done for every year they have marshalled here; Bob Spicer, of his own volition, brought along the bananas and extra Kit Kats at CP8 and Ron Cutler, who organised the finish at Streatley, provided the cakes there.

ALAN SMITH

CERTIFICATES AND COMMEMORATIVE BADGES

Every finisher in the 40 and 20 mile walks is entitled to a certificate. If you didn't collect yours on the weekend of the walk it will be enclosed with this report. If you haven't got a certificate, please let me know. Everyone who started the 40 mile walk or helped is entitled to a commemorative cloth badge which is enclosed with this report. As the number of entrants was smaller than I had hoped and the number of non starters was unusually high, there are a number of these badges available at £1 each (including postage). As the expenses of the walk are high, we can do with all the money we can get, so I hope many of you will take up this offer!

LETTERS

"I very much enjoyed the walk on 6 May and wish to thank all those involved. Even the weather was favourable. The increased provision of food etc at checkpoints has not detracted from the informality of the event.

The only jarring note was the noticeably increased nuisance of motor vehicles both two and four wheeled - and in the evening I was shaken by a cyclist suddenly flying past my ear. I consider that when vehicles became entitled to use such a track. only foot and horse (borne or drawn) traffic existed and motorised transport is out of place. With gratitude to all concerned"

Gerald Bateman

"...thank you for the excellent organisation once again for this year's Ridgeway. Despite the promise of bad weather it really was a lovely day with the muddy sections only bad, not atrocious! Regret I couldn't stay on 'til Sunday this year but would hope to stay the usual two nights in the future 29 years of Ridgeways

Geoff Dumper

"...thank you for all your hard work again organising this year's Ridgeway. We had a good walk and felt ourselves well looked after with an excellent chance of not being left out on the moors if anything had happened to us. What a turn around in the weather after last year but I'd rather have it fine and warm than ---ing with rain. The superb views along the route were a good motivation to see what was coming next. The idea of the evening meal on demand at the hostel at the end was a good move.

Chris Hayward

"Many thanks for another excellent Ridgeway Walk. As my 20th it was a very special one for me and I was pleased that my efforts to recruit some old faces from Hendon Hammers paid off including Bob Jackson and Neil Lawrence both of whom had not walked since 1989. The weather was far hotter than we had anticipated and made the lunch time pint at the Shepherds Rest all the more welcome. Fortunately we had sufficient sun cream between us otherwise we really would have fried. No sign of the predicted thunder (or did I hear some rumbles in the distance?) so no need to use the walking pole as a lightning conductor! The pole was in fact largely redundant due to the good state of the track (excluding the deep water-filled ruts before the first checkpoint).

Many thanks to you and your "staff" for all the hard work on the day and the preparation over the past year. I am greatly looking forward to 2001."

Bob McGavin

"Having successfully completed the crossing on 6 May, I wish to compliment you and the other marshals, together with all the support which made this a very satisfying day. Very well done! I look forward to participating once more on a regular basis, helping to re-establish the Hendon Hammers as the team that leads the way."

Neil Lawrence

"May I thank you and your heroic band of helpers for making the Ridgeway Walk once more such an outstanding event.

Every year I think they can't possibly improve the Ridgeway any more, but you seem always to have a few more tricks up your sleeve. The organisation and back up facilities seem to run like a well oiled machine (I wish my legs did!), but I also appreciate the meticulous planning and the dedication which lie hidden behind it all.

I feel the Ridgeway has become part of the gastronomic calendar. We have all this wonderfully varied and well chosen food to help us on our way. Again, the mind boggles at the lengthy preparation going on beforehand, as we snatch the goodies from the checkpoint table."

Ken Royce (and Carl Roe)

"Thank you once again for the most enjoyable weekend I have spent in many years. Would you please thank, on my behalf, all the volunteers who made the walk possible.

The injury to my leg (*see fifth paragraph on first page*) is now fully recovered and I will be back next year"

David Threlfall

I hope you have now fully recovered from the trials of last weekend. I look back on it and think of all the best bits but my feet tell another story. Just as well we have a team of chiropodists at work - I certainly needed them this year!

Everyone who mentioned the organisation last Saturday said how well you did. I echo that entirely and even though I promised 'never again' you'll probably see me have another go next year"

Linda Wright

MARSHALS

Coach marshals - Abigail and John Elrick, Ken Royce and David Young

Ridgeway Walk Start. Overton Hill- Ken Brooks, Alan Smith, Derek Smith

Ridgeway 40 Start. Overton Hill - Mike Sandford

CP 1. Burderop Down (7 miles) - Tim Ardill. Ken Brooks, Charlie Pritchard, Alan Smith and Derek Smith

CP 2. Whitefield Hill (9.5 miles) - Angela and Brian Bellwood

CP 3. Liddington Cross Roads (13.5 miles) - Malcolm Cox, Veronica Hope and Norman Willis

Ridgeway 20 Start. Uffington Castle - Christine Cogger and Ron Cutler

CP 4. Uffington Castle (19.5 miles) - Ian Mitchell, Keith Rix, Mike Sandford and Lesley Seeker

CP 5, Eastmanton Down (23 miles) - Helen and Sue Offen

CP 6. Yew Down (28 miles) – James, Pam and Steve Deverill

CP 7. Gore Hill (32.5 miles) - Mary and Mike Newland

CP 8, Compton Cross Tracks (34.5 miles) -Sue Arnold, Peter Dziwior, Harold Mann and Bob Spicer

(afternoon): Helen and Stuart Walker*(early evening until closing time)

CP 9. Starveall Turn (36.5 miles) - Ray Stagles (afternoon): Chris Eley and Richard Killick

Finish. Streatley Youth Hostel - Sue Arnold, Ian Briggs, Vanessa Brown, Christine Cogger, Ron Cutler, Mike

Fleet, Peter Dziwior, Lesley Seeker and Mike Teske

Certificates - Ian Briggs, Christine Cogger, Catherine O'Shea and, after the event, Alan Smith

Fold up marshal - Alan Smith

Fold up marshal's driver - Ken Brooks

Sweepers -Dave Dare, Keith Rix, Alan Smith and Derek Smith

Transport for retired walkers/marshals - Angela and Brian Bellwood, Malcolm Cox, Veronica Hope,

Mike Sandford, Ken Styan, Helen and Stuart Walker.

*Helen and Stuart Walker also visited CPs to bring them extra water before taking over CP 8.
