

talking walking

Oxfordshire Ramblers Issue 69, July 2026



Every cloudless sky has a silver lining

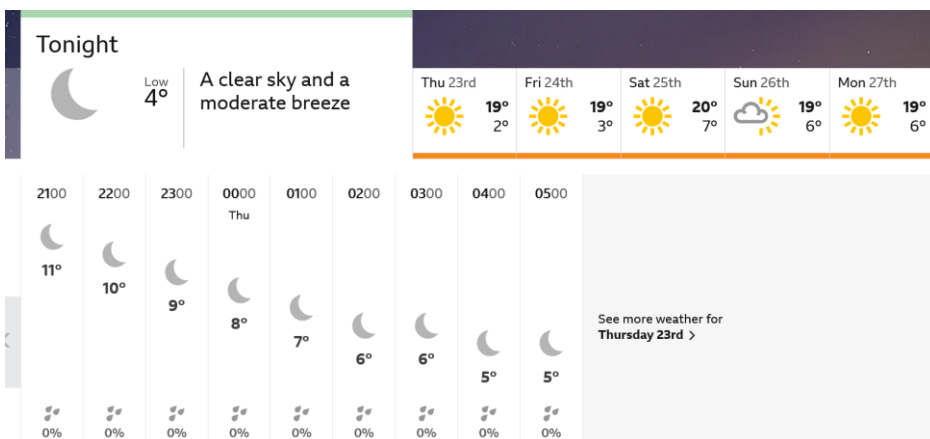
I know, that doesn't make sense but stick with me.

In April of this year, we had a long spell of dry days with blue skies and corresponding sunshine, although with a cool wind from the north east. At that time, I talked with a neighbour who takes his horse onto the Ridgeway and adjacent byways. He commented that the dry conditions, so early in the year, had produced a hard, ridged surface on which it was difficult for his horse to find a sure footing. He added that we had the same weather in April of last year, to be followed by

a very dry summer, with record high temperatures, including several heatwaves. Farmers suffered stunted crops, and his horse was probably none too pleased. He hoped that this year's repeat of last April's weather would not turn out to be a harbinger of another very hot summer. Well, his fears were well founded.

Continued ...

BBC weather forecast 22 April 2026



Cover photo:
strolling in
welcome shade.
Photo Keith
Frayn

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Unless otherwise stated, items were written by the editor.
Back issues www.ramblers-oxon.org.uk/magazine.html



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In the shade, 22 May. Photo Gill Hawkins

The last week in May saw temperatures at or near 30C in Oxfordshire. Below average temperatures were experienced during the first two weeks of June, sometimes with that increasingly rare phenomenon, rain. ▼



All kitted-up on 13 June. Photo Becky David

SN7

✓ Added

Today

30°
17°

Sunny and a moderate breeze

⚠

BBC weather forecast on 22 June

Tue 23rd 35° 20°	Wed 24th 37° 21°	Thu 25th 36° 21°	Fri 26th 30° 17°	Sat 27th
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⚠ Weather warnings issued

▼

1400	1500	1600	1700	1800	1900	2000	2100	2200	2300	0000 Tue	0100	0200	0300
29°	30°	30°	30°	29°	28°	27°	25°	23°	22°	21°	20°	19°	19°
0%	0%	0%	0%	40%	40%	39%	35%	34%	18%	0%	0%	18%	10%
← 11	← 11	← 11	← 10	← 9	← 10	← 10	← 9	← 8	← 7	← 6	← 6	← 6	← 5

Shortly afterwards the thermostat was turned up even higher than in May. Around the middle of June, the thermometer rose well above the monthly average, topping 30C several days in a row during the last week of the month. ▲

High temperatures were forecast to continue into July.



Cancelations

The hothouse conditions inevitably had a detrimental effect on our walks programme. On June 20 our Oxfordshire Ramblers Chair, Richard Birch, posted one cancellation on our website.

Oxfordshire Walks

Sorry - the following walk(s) have been cancelled

Didcot & Wallingford Group: Thursday, 25th June, 10am at Blewbury, the recreation ground car park, Boham's Road off the A417, **DW - Blewbury circular CANCELLED**, 8mi / 12.9km
Reason: Extreme heat.

The next day this had increased to three.

Sorry - the following walk(s) have been cancelled

Vale of White Horse Group: Tuesday, 23rd June, 10:30am at Uffington, the village hall car park, **V - Uffington Longcot Circular CANCELLED**, 5.8mi / 9.3km
Reason: Amber Warning of hot weather.
Bicester & Kidlington Group: Tuesday, 23rd June, 11:30am at London, near the Cutty Sark, Greenwich, BK - **London, Greenwich Park and the Thames River CANCELLED**, 5mi / 8km
Reason: This walk is postponed due to Excess Temperature
Didcot & Wallingford Group: Thursday, 25th June, 10am at Blewbury, the recreation ground car park, Boham's Road off the A417, **DW - Blewbury circular CANCELLED**, 8mi / 12.9km
Reason: Extreme heat.

Then the trickle turned into a flood, seven walks having been cancelled 24 hours later for that week (one other cancellation was for August), rising to eight for that week on the following day.

Sorry: We have had to cancel 9 walks.



Gill Hawkins
22 June at 22:55 · 🌐

The Bicester and Kidlington rambles scheduled for Tuesday and Thursday morning have been cancelled due to the extreme heat.
Sorry for any inconvenience.

 10

 3





Oxford group walk from Noke via Otmoor on 27th May cancelled due to extreme weather



Gill Hawkins
23 May · 🌐

Leisurely walk in the sun, circular from Ascot under Wychwood, plenty of stops in the shade and a picnic lunch, wonderful, thanks Pete.



Mary Gough
👤 Top contributor · 25 May · 🌐

Some pics from walk from Waterperry. Too hot for many pics

I started writing this article during the last week of June and finished it, or so I thought, on 2 July. Then I wrote “High temperatures were forecast to continue into July.” As I write now, on 7 July, that has turned into an understatement:

heatwave conditions are forecast until beyond the middle of the month. So, once again, walk cancellations have been rolling in. (A heatwave in Oxfordshire is defined as three or more consecutive days of [27C or higher](#).)

Tue 7th  30° 15°	Wed 8th  31° 17°	Thu 9th  33° 18°	Fri 10th  33° 17°	Sat 11th  31° 15°	Sun 12th  28° 13°	Mon 13th  28° 13°	Tue 14th  2
Wed 15th  29° 15°	Thu 16th  29° 15°	Fri 17th  28° 16°	Sat 18th  26° 14°	Sun 19th  26° 15°			

Sorry: We have had to cancel 7 walks.

I hope that I have learned a lesson: don't write an article on the British weather until the eve of publication. You might want to save this issue of the Oxfordshire Ramblers newsletter as a 'cut-out-and-keep', for future reminiscing of this uniquely hot summer. Or is it? Will this prove to be the new normal? When walk leaders submit their walks to our 2027 summer programme, should they each have a Plan B? This could be a very short walk e.g. three miles, preferably with shady spots at frequent intervals. And/or with an earlier start than usual, before the cauldron really heats up. Or switch the walk to the evening.

Vale group's 30C rule

Several years ago, I was on a five-mile Vale group midweek walk, starting on the Ridgeway. The going was easy as we first walked on the level and then descended into the Vale. However, the temperature was in the upper 20s. We had drunk lots of water even by the quarter way stage, and we carried on in that vein. Of course, a walker that goes down must come up. Fortunately, the penultimate path, which was the steepest, had trees on either side, giving us much appreciated respite. We drank our last drops of water as we reached the start point. My recollection is that we were all rather surprised at how much we had drunk, and that we would have consumed more had we had it with us. Really hot days in Oxfordshire are (were?) not that frequent, and to have one coinciding with one of our walks was rare.



	Thursday, 9th July, V - Wantage circular via East Challow CANCELLED , 4.7mi / 7.6km
	Thursday, 9th July, DW - Ewelme circular CANCELLED , 5.5mi / 8.9km
	Thursday, 9th July, WO - BOOKING REQUIRED - Chadlington to Eventode valley circular CANCELLED , 6.5mi / 10.5km; Contact Graham W.
	Thursday, 9th July, V - Chilton, Icknield Greenway and Ridgeway circular CANCELLED , 7.6mi / 12.2km; Contact John G.
	Thursday, 9th July, BNO - Kineton Evening , 3mi / 4.8km; Contact Hasna K.
	Friday, 10th July, HG - A walk around the lakes in Charvil , 3mi / 4.8km
	Friday, 10th July, BK - Fringford evening pub walk , 4mi / 6.4km
	Saturday, 11th July, V - The Wychwood Way, leg 1, Stonesfield to Chadlington CANCELLED , 12.2mi / 19.6km
	Saturday, 11th July, WO - BOOKING REQUIRED - Lower Heyford to Somerton Circular CANCELLED , 11mi / 17.7km; Contact Matthew S.
	Saturday, 11th July, BK - Islip, Beckley and Otmoor , 11mi / 17.7km
	Saturday, 11th July, BNO - Duns Tew-Over Worton , 4.6mi / 7.4km; Contact

A couple of days later, with the temperature forecast to reach 30C or more, the leader of a longer weekend walk halved the mileage. At the next committee meeting, Vale group created a self-imposed rule that if 30C was forecast for any point during one of our walks, it would be cancelled, no ifs or buts. This was primarily to protect the leader, who otherwise might feel obliged to lead the walk against their better judgement. Of course, a leader is free to cancel a walk at high but sub-30C temperatures if they feel that to go ahead might affect their health adversely, or that of one or more of the people who might have come along.

Walks Guidance

This guidance is taken from the Oxfordshire Ramblers [website](#). Once there, click on the 'walking' tab. Select Walks Guidance from the subsequent drop-down menu.

Inclement weather

Hot, cold, wet or windy weather - It is the responsibility of walkers to contact the leader if they feel there is a doubt that the walk will take place. Typically, this would be in the event of very challenging weather conditions. For example, ice, snow, flood or fog may mean that it is unsafe for walkers to travel to the start location. On the walk itself the route may be flooded, very windy conditions could cause hazards in woods, or high temperatures could cause health issues.

In forecast temperatures of 30°C or higher the leader should make an informed decision on whether it is safe for the walk to go ahead. The leader should base their decision on the forecast temperature, the length of the walk, the terrain, and the amount of shade. Members must accept and support the Leader's decision. If the Leader decides the walk can go ahead safely then walkers should be reminded of the precautions to be taken including: take plenty of water; wear high-factor sun cream; and wear a hat.

In the event of adverse weather the walk leader has the authority to adapt the walk route and distance as required, or even in extreme conditions to cancel the walk.

If a Leader decides it is necessary to cancel a walk every reasonable effort should be made to inform walkers (it is accepted that this may not always be possible, for example where a walk is cancelled at short notice): Continued ...

How a cloudless sky has a silver lining

I love ale (*not* the other type of beer) but my intake is very much temperature dependent. For most months of the year a hot cup of tea is usually more attractive than a cool beer. Once it gets to 20C or so, my 'have a beer' gene kicks in. As the temperature gets into the high 20s, my brain is screaming at me to do as I'm told. So, while walking in very hot weather can be unpleasant, the silver lining is a cool beer at the end of it. Or, better still, pass on the walking and gardening etc, go straight to the beer. Which reminds me, my stocks are running low.



As Mary Poppins sang, these are a few of my favourite things. Photo Dave Cavanagh

Contrasting kit required during one month, April



24 April, hats on for a different reason. Photo Keith Frayn



Bluebells in May? Not a chance

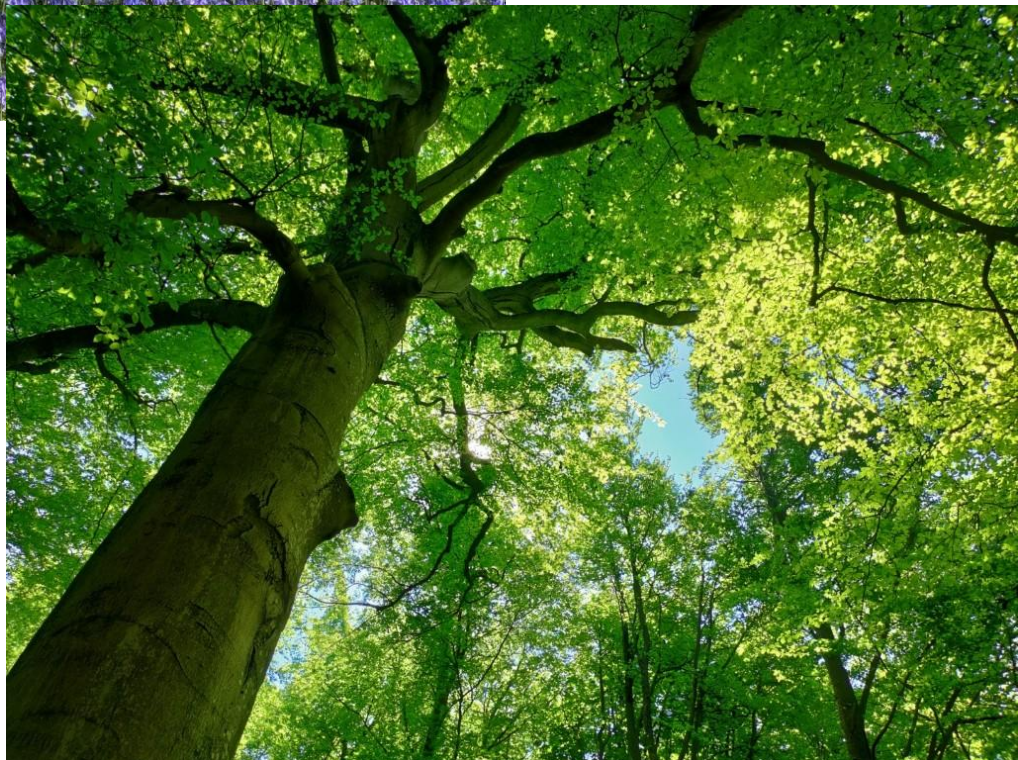
On the first Thursday of every May, Vale group has a pilgrimage from Faringdon westwards to Badbury Clumps. This is a beech-covered Iron Age 'fort' sporting a gorgeous carpet of bluebells. We knew before we got there that all the bluebells would have gone over; everything has been flowering very early this year.

A few years ago, our bluebell walk broke the Trade Descriptions Act* for the opposite reason; a cool early spring had resulted in the bluebells being much later in May. This year our focus was raised to the beautiful canopy of the beech trees.

*Actually, the Trade Descriptions Act (1968) was repealed in 2008, to be replaced by the Consumer Protection from Unfair Trading Regulations (2008). Trips off the tongue, doesn't it?



Bluebells photographed at Badbury Clumps on 9 April by Rosemary Williams.



The beech canopy at Badbury Clumps on 7 May. Photo Dave Cavanagh



Oxfordshire ramblings

will give you a brief update each quarter
on the current issues in Ramblers
Oxfordshire Area

*Richard Birch, Chair of Oxfordshire
Ramblers*

Annual Picnic

On 7 June 2026 about 65 members enjoyed the Oxfordshire Ramblers Annual Picnic. This year it was hosted by West Oxfordshire Group in the grounds of Combe Reading Room. There were six walks to choose from, designed to arrive at the venue around 1230 for the picnic. The date had been moved from its usual end of June slot because in the past few years the day of the picnic has been very hot. This year we had perfect temperatures to enjoy sitting (yes, they had picnic chairs!) in the garden eating our picnics along with drinks and scrumptious cakes provided by West Oxfordshire. Thanks to all that contributed to an excellent day.



Area picnic. Photo Mary Gough



Area picnic. Photo Richard Birch

Extreme Heat

Sticking with the topic of temperature, I'm sure you have all been suffering recently during the last three heatwaves. Even Ramblers found the extreme temperatures too hot to handle and we chose to cancel some of the walks. The decision of whether to cancel is based on the forecast temperature, the length and route of the walk. For example, it may be fine to continue with a short, shady walk, but may be unwise to go ahead with a longer, exposed walk. The decision on whether to cancel is usually made by the walk leader a day or two before the walk is due, although in winter months it can be on the morning of the walk, so it is **essential** that members check the status of the walk online on the Oxfordshire Ramblers website <https://www.ramblers-oxon.org.uk/> before setting off for the start location.

Continued ...

General Council

The Ramblers AGM (referred to as 'General Council') is held each year in April and each Area can send two delegates. This year it was on 25 April 2026 at the NEC Birmingham with Pat Lonergan (Area Webmaster and Membership Secretary) and I attending. The main item on the Agenda was the proposed changes to Ramblers Governance, including changes to the format of the AGM and a move to a system of one member one vote for the appointment of Trustees. The proposals just failed to get the 75% majority required for it to be passed so things continue unchanged for the moment.

Oxfordshire Ramblers had put forward a Motion for discussion at General Council:

"This General Council believes that the recommended Walk Leader to Walker ratios specified in the Walk Leaders Handbook are too restrictive and are not representative of the actual ratios used by our Walk Leaders. General Council therefore urges the Board of Trustees to carry out a survey of Groups to determine what ratios are successfully used by our Walk Leaders, and to modify the Walk Leaders Handbook to reflect this."

After discussion the Motion failed (by about 60%:40%) because it was generally felt that the motion wasn't needed because the guidance states that the walk leader can lead as many walkers as they are comfortable with.

Botley West Solar Farm

The Applicant has now supplied further information as requested by the Secretary of State. This further information is currently being evaluated, and we will respond before the deadline of 16 July 2026.

Photo Dave Cavanagh, 7 May

rest stop



When shade is not available, make your own. Photo Gill Hawkins

I don't like people who take drugs... customs men for example. *Mick Miller*

Old professors never die; they just lose their faculties. *Stephen Fry*

Men are fantastic - as a concept. *Jo Brand*

If you boil a funny bone, it becomes a laughing stock.



One of our stool's legs would appear to be levitating. Perhaps it's practising to be a dog? Photo Dave Cavanagh

GLEAM



Green Lanes Environmental Action Movement
Patron 2001 - 2021 HRH The Duke of Edinburgh KG KT

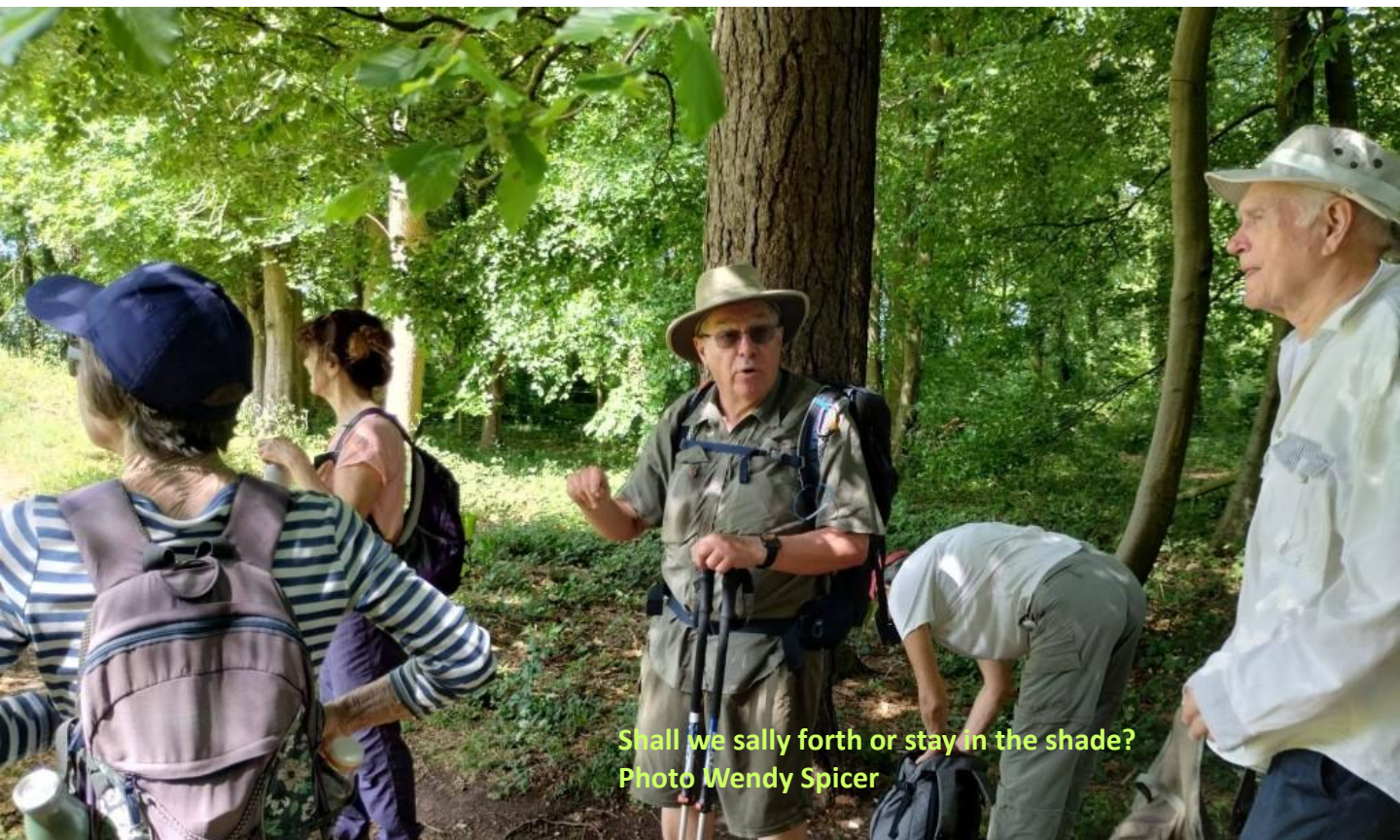
The pressure group, founded in 1995, which campaigns for changes in the law to stop thoughtless off-road drivers damaging or destroying green lanes, and the rights of walkers, riders, pedal cyclists, carriage drivers and the disabled to use them without danger, difficulty and inconvenience.

We have a large individual membership as well as many Parish Councils and conservation organisations big and small, throughout England and Wales. A great many MPs and active members of the House of Lords, of all parties, are Honorary Members.



If you ever wondered what damage recreational off-road vehicles – 4x4s and motor bikes – can do to unsurfaced byways (a.k.a. green lanes), take a look at the videos compiled on the website of the charity Green Lanes Environmental Action Group (GLEAM), of which I am a member <https://www.gleam-uk.org/videos/>. GLEAM exists to protect ancient ways from the ravages of recreational motor vehicles.

In the words of Ian Ritchie, Chair of GLEAM and former Chair of The Friends of the Ridgeway, “My fellow GLEAM team members have done a brilliant job in bringing together examples from all round the country of off-roaders destroying green lanes in their selfish quest for ‘fun’. Ironically, we have been aided in this by the off-roaders themselves. They love to record their ‘adventures’ on video and then post the results in the public domain on the internet.”



Shall we sally forth or stay in the shade?
Photo Wendy Spicer



Cowslips photographed on 11 April by Sandra Newton



Photo by Steph Woodley, 26 April



Spotted Orchid photographed
by Jan Knight on 25 June

What a difference a law makes

Dave Cavanagh

The surface of the Ridgeway has seen a wonderful improvement, starting 20 years ago. What caused the change?

In the 1980s, 90s and early 2000s, parts of the Ridgeway were turned into quagmires by recreational vehicles - 4x4s and motor bikes. This ended in 2006 when the whole of the Ridgeway in Oxfordshire, and the westerly few miles of it in West Berkshire, were prohibited to non-essential vehicles, all year round, by the passage of the Natural Environment and Rural Affairs Act (2006) (NERCA). The Friends of the Ridgeway (FoR) had campaigned for this for decades, with a concerted campaign in the House of Lords and House of Commons in the early noughties helping to get protection not only for part of the Ridgeway but also for many (though not all) other byways in England and Wales.

Members of the FoR took photos of the horrible condition of the Ridgeway in the 1990s and early noughties. These photos are part of FoR's archive. In March I retraced the steps of these members along a three-mile section of the Ridgeway from Scutchamer Knob (in Oxfordshire; about 2 miles west of the A34) heading eastwards into West Berkshire, under the A34 and as far as Several Down. I identified the spots where photos had been taken and took my own photos. These reveal the dramatic change for the good brought about by NERCA; the verges of the Ridgeway have reverted to being covered in healthy vegetation, whilst the Trail itself is largely green, thanks to re-growth of grasses. To their credit, 4x4 and motorcycle users obeyed the law, allowing the surface of the Ridgeway to recover.

On the next page is a photo taken in March 1994 about 100m east of where the Ridgeway goes under the A34. Note the double farm gates on the left-hand side; these very precisely mark the location. Similarly, the triangular copse in the upper right side, with the Ridgeway bending to the left, and a bridleway to the right, marks the location.



Photo taken by a Friend of the Ridgeway in March 1994 i.e. pre-NERCA protection



Photo by Dave Cavanagh, taken on 26 March 2026 i.e. 20 years after NERCA protection



Note the pre-NERCA area (top photo) despoiled and made grassless by off-road vehicles was approximately three times the width of the Ridgeway Trail used today. Most of the area has been recolonised by grass since NERCA. It was my observation, here and elsewhere along the Trail, that farmers still drove along it, sometimes making ruts. However, they kept to the same line each year, leaving plenty of undamaged surface for other users.

Why weren't recreational vehicles prohibited along the whole of the Ridgeway?

The Ridgeway, and many, though not all, other byways had been classified as Roads Used as Public Paths (RUPPs). It was these that became restricted byways as a consequence of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act (2006, NERCA). Those byways that had already been designated as Byways Open to All Traffic (BOATs) were, sadly, not reclassified as restricted byways. If you want the full story, you can read about it [here](#), in the Friends of the Ridgeway summer 2022 newsletter.

West Berkshire Council has recently resurfaced a little over 700 metres of the Ridgeway along the section just east of the A34, under which the Ridgeway goes. This section is a restricted byway, consequently it cannot be used by non-essential motor vehicles. The new surface is wonderful. The Council would not have contemplated doing this were it not for the protection afforded by NERCA (2006). ▼





Photo Kerry Forkner, 14 June

Ruth Cornish led the Day 10 walk of the Thames Path Relay

Ruth Cornish, of Thame & Wheatley Ramblers, led Day 10 of the Thames Path Relay on 14 June. The event was inspired by the 30th anniversary of the Thames Path National Trail this year. The Path is 185.2 miles in length from its source in the Cotswolds to Woolwich in London, and the Relay happened over 24 days.



View to Rush Court. Photo Jason Debney



Crossing the River Thame, Ruth at front right.
Photo Clare Jarratt

Ruth's walk started at Day's Lock, situated near Dorchester-on-Thames and proceeded via the new walkway across Benson Weir, finishing in Wallingford. Wendy Tobitt, Chair of the Thames Path Partnership that manages and promotes this National Trail, wrote on Facebook that Ruth's walk was joined by local historian Jason Debney of Brightwell-cum-Sotwell, who described the wildlife along the river and its history.



Photo Dave Cavanagh, 5 May

Drinking water is once again available at Sparsholt Firs.



Ridgeway National Trail

★ Favourites · 8h · 🌐

...

Trail maintenance goes on no matter the weather!

We wanted to share a photo of the dramatic 'tap ice fountain' from 2018, when it was first apparent that additional insulation for the water tap located at Sparsholts Furs was needed. Thanks to our volunteers Dick and Bob involved in this small but important service upgrade. With this new housing in place means we can leave the tap on for users all year round. There is still a new sign to install and we plan to replace the tap itself in due course, but it is now ready for use. You will find the tap at <https://w3w.co/eclipses.backs.jaundice> and on the interactive map on the National Trails website here: <https://www.nationaltrail.co.uk/.../trail-information/>

#Volunteering #Countryside #NationalTrails #VisitEngland

The images show the 2018 ice fountain and the new tap housing to ensure year-round availability.



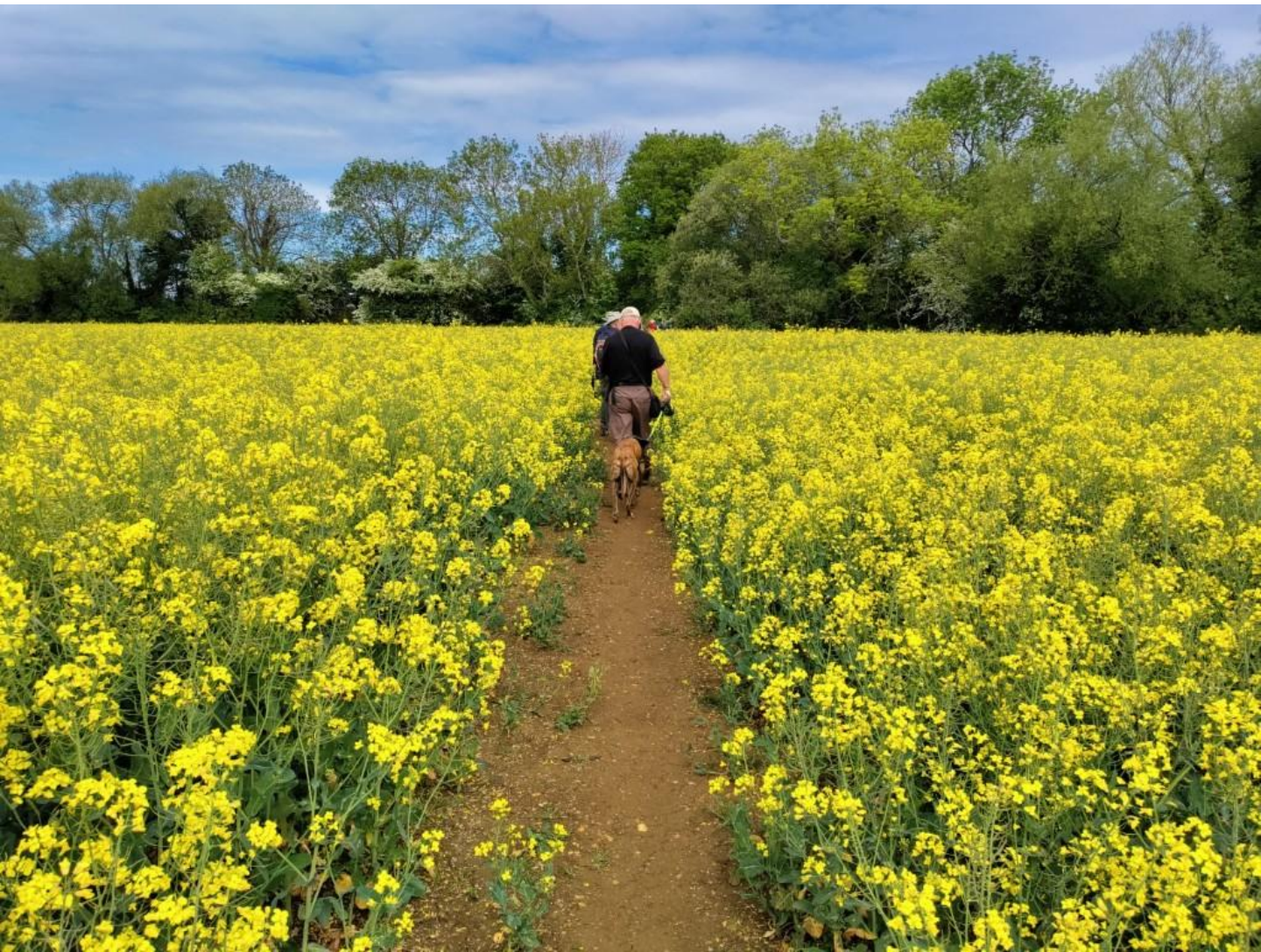
Subsequent to this post on Facebook, a new tap has been installed in the new housing and it is working.

Wendy Tobitt, of The Friends of the Ridgeway, writes 'The tap is a memorial to 14-year-old Peter Wren, who had walked the Ridgeway and loved the countryside. Peter was tragically killed in an accident on Christmas Eve in 1978 while cycling to sing in his local church in Sarisbury Green, Fareham.'



Photographed by Becky David On 30 May

Photo Dave Cavanagh, 5 May



Feet up



You're missing it now, aren't you?
Photo Margaret Atkins

To stop ants from coming into your house, leave a saucer of milk outside. Adult ants drink it, and it affects ant reproduction. The young are born without toes, so they can't climb into your cavity walls. This effect is called *lack toes in toddler ants*.



Photo Mary Gough

Roadside sign in Westcot, Vale of White Horse. Photo Dave Cavanagh



I bought some pork chops and told the butcher to make them lean. He said, 'Which way?'
Tommy Cooper

Don't cry because it's over. Smile because it happened. *Dr Seuss*