

## Visiting The Ridgeway as a physically disabled person

### An information note to help people with mobility issues plan their visit



*Visit to The Ridgeway near White Horse Hill, Uffington, in September 2019*

### Do disabled people visit The Ridgeway?

Yes, disabled people visit The Ridgeway in wheelchairs, hand-trikes, mobility scooters or off-road mobility scooters such as the Trampler (all called mobility vehicles). This can be for a few hours, multi-day visits and everything in between. The Disabled Ramblers hold group events on the Trail and also voted The Ridgeway their favourite location in ITV's 'Britain's Favourite Walks: Top 100 with Julia Bradbury' in 2018 – take a look at this recording of the programme, starting at 55 minutes: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?app=desktop&v=QLToIVS4znE&t=0s>

### Is The Ridgeway for me?

The Ridgeway as a long distance, exposed route is a challenge to most people, whatever their mobility, and so it's best to start off with particularly scenic stretches of a few miles before considering all 87 miles! Rewarding visits are possible as many disabled people have demonstrated.

It is an advantage for anyone to come to the Trail with some prior experience of exploring the countryside, but National Trails are designed to encourage and support 'beginners' so there is, for example, adequate signage on the Trail to show the way and a free enquiry service to answer questions from the general public.

It may be worthwhile to contact organisations where disabled people explore the countryside together and share information, including videos of disabled rambles, to build experience and confidence.

- Disabled ramblers: <https://disabledramblers.co.uk/>
- Experience Community: <https://www.experiencecommunity.co.uk/>

### How difficult is The Ridgeway for people using mobility vehicles?

Due to the surface of much of The Ridgeway, the Disabled Ramblers recommend a mobility scooter capable of being used off-road. Two such scooters are the [TGA Supersport](#) and the [Tramper](#). Disabled Ramblers also recommend going with one or more able-bodied friends who can help in case of difficulty. Some sections, such as the Wantage Monument to Bury Down, they rate as Category 3 “suitable for users of heavy duty off-road capable scooters.” Sparsholt Firs to White Horse Hill they rate as a Category 3+ which means that the user needs to be experienced in dealing with difficult surfaces. Overton Hill to Hackpen Hill is rated as a Category 4 and consequently they would not lead a ramble in this area because they consider it should only be tackled by users who are able to walk for short sections while their able-bodied helpers move the scooter across any mud and deep ruts. More information about the Disabled Ramblers categories is here: <http://disabledramblers.co.uk/route-categories/>

Further details are provided below in relation to surfaces and barriers such as stiles and places best suited to mobility vehicles. The Ridgeway Partnership aspires to provide stretches of Trail suited to disabled visitors and details will be made available on the website as soon as possible.



*Nick Wilson, far left, attempts 96 miles on the Trail to raise awareness and funds for the mental health charity Mind in 2022 ([www.nickwilson.live/96for96](http://www.nickwilson.live/96for96))*

## Where can I go with a mobility vehicle?

By law, a disabled person can take a wheelchair or other mobility vehicle on all rights of way. Rights of way include public footpaths, bridleways, restricted byways and byways. The Ridgeway follows rights of way for its entire length and The Ridgeway is signposted to show it is a right of way.

Many stretches of The Ridgeway are free from restrictive gates, are relatively level and have a largely firm surface during good weather. More details are provided below regarding surfaces and barriers, but the list below specifies some locations where accessibility is relatively good. Note that parking spaces cannot be guaranteed and large car parks are starred:

- Wiltshire: Hackpen Hill car park to Barbury Castle Country Park car park\*.
- Wiltshire: Southend village to Upper Upham (small area of parking on Trail near Copse Drove, near Woodsend).
- Wiltshire – Oxfordshire: Fox Hill parking area to Uffington White Horse Hill National Trust car park\*. (There is a small area for disabled parking on the Trail if you are prepared to drive along a bumpy byway from National Trust car park to Ridgeway.)
- Oxfordshire: Segsbury (nearest parking on Trail off A338) to B4494 Wantage Monument car park off B4494.
- Oxfordshire – Berkshire: Scutchamer car park to Bury Down car park\*.
- Berkshire: Several Down (nearest parking on crossroads with Trail and Churn Road, north of Compton) to Streatley car park at end of Rectory Road.
- Berkshire – Oxfordshire: Streatley village to South Stoke village.
- Oxfordshire: North Farm near Britwell Salome (small area of parking on Trail near here) to Pyrton (nearest parking on Trail off Hill Road, Watlington).
- Oxfordshire: Chinnor village to Hempton Wainhill (nearest parking in Bledlow village).
- Buckinghamshire: Princes Risborough stretch behind the town (not up Kop Hill!). There are car parks in the town\*.
- Hertfordshire: Pavis Wood (ad-hoc parking on roadside) to Wigginton (ad-hoc parking on Fox Road).

## What Ridgeway circular routes are recommended by the Disabled Ramblers?

The Disabled Ramblers make their routes available on the navigation app Outdoor Active:

Ashdown House to Wayland's Smithy <https://out.ac/EZOsk>  
Bury Down to the Wantage Memorial <https://out.ac/EZOwv>  
Bishopstone Link to the Ridgeway <https://out.ac/EZIGn>  
Compton to Ridgeway circular <https://out.ac/3uqnvE>

## How do I prepare for a visit to The Ridgeway and what do I need?

Consider your levels of fitness, the equipment you need, how you will get to and from the Trail and the risks.



Whatever form your mobility vehicle takes, note that they need to be able to cope with off-road, uneven ground conditions and the Trail is managed to cater for mobility vehicles no wider than the legal maximum of 0.85 metres.

Whatever your capabilities, confidence or other factor, it is wise for any visitor to schedule enough time to avoid feeling time-pressured, especially when you need to take it carefully if the ground is hard-going or the weather is poor. For enjoyment and safety reasons, you may like to visit The Ridgeway with at least one other person. It is often handy to have a person walking with you so that they can help keep your mobility vehicle from tipping on uneven ground, for example. Before going to The Ridgeway, carry out research, ideally including a pre-visit to the Trail if you are not familiar with the route and checking our online interactive map for parking areas on the Trail etc. Check the events calendar on this website if you want to avoid times when the Trail could be busy with event runners, cyclists etc.

There are roads passing over the Trail as well as nearby car parks, so this provides ample opportunity to break up your visit(s) into manageable sections and to have supplies of drink, food and plasters refreshed! Our online interactive map is helpful in planning sections because it provides a distance measuring tool as well as locations of car parks, water taps etc.

### **How do I get to and from The Ridgeway?**

There is a list of local taxi firms available from our website, although you will need to check which could transport your mobility vehicle:

[https://egwt.s3.eu-west-2.amazonaws.com/uploads/rw\\_taxis\\_nov\\_2013.pdf](https://egwt.s3.eu-west-2.amazonaws.com/uploads/rw_taxis_nov_2013.pdf)

Our online interactive map shows car parks, train stations and toilets with information specifically for disabled people.

### **What risks should I be aware of?**

Bear in mind that the phone and internet signal can be poor in places.

Take a note of the location of road crossings along your route so that you know the nearest vehicle access point for people to come to your aid in case of emergency. It is not legal to drive on The Ridgeway, even as a blue badge holder, unless the Trail is a byway without a Traffic Regulation Order in force at the time or you have obtained landowner permission. Information about driving on the Trail is available on our website.

Your risk assessment needs to carefully consider what weather and ground conditions you will accept and consider postponing to a later date if the conditions make the surface/going too difficult. Details about the Trail's surface is provided below. All visitors are advised to schedule their visit to The Ridgeway for times of the year when the ground and weather are conducive, with this being particularly relevant if you are not experienced in this sort of activity or you want to enjoy yourself more than face an endurance challenge! For example, the ground can be slippery after rain, especially on chalk slopes, and there is little shade on sunny summer days on the high downs between Streatley and Overton Hill. Also remember

that daylight hours are reduced in the winter so there are short days to complete your visit.

When crossing roads, note that some are fast even if they appear 'rural'. If your mobility vehicle means you sit low to the ground or have to stick out into the road to see traffic, we recommend you have someone to help you cross the road safely. Wear high-vis clothing and avoid crossing roads in poor light.

There are animals along The Ridgeway, including dogs on leads and off leads, horses being ridden along the Trail and sheep, cows and horses in fields. The Trail passes through fields near Barbury and Chivery where cattle graze, so bear in mind they can be curious animals.

### **What is the surface like and will there be barriers such as stiles?**

The Ridgeway is a rough track in most places and it is not tarmac. There are some stretches of the Trail where ground conditions are poor at all times of year or just during/after wet weather. The greatest difficulty will be where there are long stretches of parallel wheel ruts created by vehicles. Rutted sections are an occasional feature of the stretch in the North Wessex Downs (Streatley to Avebury) so be wary of getting tired and frustrated in these areas. The longest and worst stretch is from Overton Hill to Monkton Down near Avebury and this is marked with a yellow warning triangle on our online interactive map. At some times of year when the ground can be soft/wet, the surface is slippery so take care. There are some short but steep, heavily eroded chalk slopes which could be dangerous/very difficult in wet conditions, even with someone pulling/pushing too – unfortunately, this means some stretches which are ok for most of their length will be made difficult just because of a short slope (e.g. Sparsholt to Uffington). You can use an Ordnance Survey map (including the website interactive map) to look for tight contours to identify steep slopes along the Trail. Make sure your tyres have suitable grip, your brakes work etc and also that anyone pulling/pushing you has footwear with suitable grip. Sometimes the Trail can be dusty so take a scarf and glasses on dusty days if your trike, for example, is close to the ground.

There are no stiles on The Ridgeway. Where there are pinchpoints or 'gaps', the Trail is managed according to the legal maximum width of a mobility vehicle which is 0.85 metres but wider gaps are frequent on bridleways, restricted byways and byways. There are stretches of footpaths with gates in the Chilterns and, whilst some have RADAR keys to allow a mobility vehicle to pass through, there are some that are not accessible. In contrast, the North Wessex Downs stretch of 44 miles from Streatley to Overton Hill is a wide track where the occasional vehicle barriers (gates) are combined with an adjacent 'gap' that is wide enough for a mobility vehicle to fit through, so moving along this part of the Trail should be relatively uninterrupted (except where the surface makes it hard going).

### **What should I do if I have a problem on The Ridgeway?**

If you have planned ahead and come prepared, hopefully you will avoid major problems and be able to cope with any problem that does arise. If appropriate, please report problems to the Trail Officer. Feedback from disabled visitors about

which parts of the Trail were easier going/most enjoyable, as well as which stretches were hard work, is useful because it identifies where the interest is highest (e.g targeting surface improvements) and improves the guidance we provide to disabled visitors.

### **How do I share my Ridgeway experience with others?**

Lots of people share photos and stories of their time on The Ridgeway on social media. Use the hashtag #TheRidgeway and note The Ridgeway's pages:

[www.facebook.com/RidgewayNationalTrail](https://www.facebook.com/RidgewayNationalTrail)  
<https://www.facebook.com/RidgewayNationalTrail/>

For people completing all 87 miles of The Ridgeway, there is a completion certificate and the opportunity to join the Ridgeway Hall of Fame. Details are provided on the website and Facebook FAQ.

*Information note produced by Sarah Wright, Ridgeway Trail Officer, and John Cuthbertson, Disabled Ramblers Chairman. July 2022.*