

Ridgeway events update 31st July 2020

Introduction

There seems to be a huge effort underway to adapt events so that are safe to run during the Covid-19 pandemic; predominantly so participants feel safe to attend, but this will only have a positive effect on the event as a whole and how it's perceived by the community.

Events which have been held for many years on The Ridgeway will find a lot of change is required, creating lots of extra work this year. For events which involve volunteer help, demands are being shouldered by volunteers. Many charities are under pressure to fundraise and in some cases income generated by events affects people's jobs and livelihoods.

We appreciate event organisers' efforts to ensure high quality, safe events on The Ridgeway. The Ridgeway Partnership wants to support organisers for the benefit of the public who want to enjoy the Trail through events and to help the local economy recover.

The Ridgeway Officer will not support an event that risks putting participants and the general public in a position that exposes them to the coronavirus contrary to Covid-19 government guidance.

In addition to the usual event guidance for The Ridgeway, this Covid-19 specific guidance sets out information to help event organisers under the following topics:

- **Changing use of The Ridgeway by the public and events**
- **Ensuring Ridgeway events are Covid-secure**
- **Local restrictions**
- **What activities are possible along The Ridgeway**
- **Restrictions on size of event**
- **Travel and parking for events**
- **Keeping event participants safe during Covid-19**
- **Event communications and public image of your event**
- **Appendix- Further resources to help event organisers**
- **Appendix- Safety Advisory Group contacts**
- **Appendix - Starting point list of safety hazards specific to Ridgeway**
- **Appendix- Hospitals near The Ridgeway**

Changing use of The Ridgeway by the public and events

Weekends in the summer are popular but we are also seeing a busier Trail and different patterns of use through the week during Covid-19. It is likely that, as part of national trends, local people are using their local countryside more regularly. The Ridgeway is near to large settlements and provides a relatively wide/large space to move around, so it is busy/popular during Covid-19 with local residents, including people living in major towns nearby, and those living further afield but accessible along the M4 and M40. There is potential for The Ridgeway to be a more popular holiday destination this year if people are not going abroad this summer.

There also appears to be more people cycling and picnicking in the countryside. Cycling on footpaths has been reported more frequently too.

Covid-19 has made things more complicated and this is why some events have simply cancelled this year. The effect on take-up and cancelled bookings has been variable – some people are keener than ever to take part in events whilst others are more cautious about going out.

Virtual events have been introduced as replacements for some Ridgeway events. One event in July used National Trails in a relay format involving one person on each leg only, working within the Covid-19 constraints of size of gatherings and social distancing.

Running events are going ahead in many places in August onwards, with agreements in place with insurers or other permits issuers. On The Ridgeway, several events planned for September onwards are aiming to go ahead.

Permits are now being issued by the Trail Running Association to hold time trial style events - i.e people starting during a time window rather than all together.

Nobody can be certain as to how things will change in the future, although this article suggests some pointers: <https://www.conference-news.co.uk/index.php/coronavirus-updates-news/uk-must-be-level-2-events-can-run-says-minister>. Governing bodies will be updating their guidance as government guidance changes and this will affect some events on The Ridgeway. For example, <https://www.englandathletics.org/athletics-and-running/news/guidance-update-for-restricted-return-to-activity-for-coaches-leaders-athletes-runners-and-facilities/>

Ensuring Ridgeway events are Covid-secure

COVID-19 is a public health emergency. Everyone needs to assess and manage the risks of COVID-19. You must make sure that the risk assessment for your event addresses the risks of COVID-19, using government guidance to inform your decisions and control measures. Guidance on carrying out work (employed and voluntary) in a Covid-secure way is now available for different sectors/industries: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/working-safely-during-coronavirus-covid-19>. The Health and Safety Executive have produced guidance and templates for Covid-19 risk assessments: <https://www.hse.gov.uk/coronavirus/working-safely/risk-assessment.htm>

Governing bodies such as UK Athletics and British Cycling will also be a critical source of Covid-secure guidance specific to your event – see Appendix for a few examples. Covid-secure measures will be a condition for obtaining permits/licences.

Guidance and the circumstance might change nearer your event but the Ridgeway Officer needs to see evidence that suitable preparations are being made in advance of the event and to be reassured that measures will be in place to ensure events are Covid-secure when they take place. Feedback from SAGs will be particularly important to the Ridgeway Officer during the Covid 19 pandemic.

Local restrictions

On 24th July, it was announced that there are local restrictions in place in the Luton area which is near the northern end of The Ridgeway. If a local COVID-19 outbreak does occur, there will be [local restrictions](#) imposed, meaning that different guidance and legislation will apply. See here as an example: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/luton-local-restrictions>. Please consult the government's local restrictions webpages to see if any restrictions are in place in your event area: <https://www.gov.uk/coronavirus>

What activities are possible along The Ridgeway

Government guidance influencing the activities, behaviour and attitudes of the general public using the Trail includes: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/staying-safe-outside-your-home/staying-safe-outside-your-home> and <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/coronavirus-covid-19-advice-on-accessing-green-spaces-safely>

As per guidance published 17th July, it is now possible for people to enjoy forms of organised recreation and sport outdoors. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance-on-phased-return-of-sport-and-recreation/guidance-for-the-public-on-the-phased-return-of-outdoor-sport-and-recreation>.

The TRA have recently started issuing permits for time trial events. Note that running event organisers do not need a permit from the TRA or UK Athletics to carry out an event – a permit is simply one way to obtain insurance and endorsement may be significant to participants. Some events are organising insurance themselves whilst permits are not available, although this involves effort and risk that organisers wouldn't usually have to accommodate. This option may be true of other types of events. Event organisers will be asked to explain the situation to the Ridgeway Officer.

Any activities that could involve crowding are a concern whilst social distancing is required. Event organisers need to consider how people involved in their event (participants, event staff, event volunteers, support teams, spectators) might combine with the general public to cause 'crowding'. A few ways event organisers are planning to avoid crowding include:

- Reduced participant numbers
- Staggered starts
- Relay formats
- Dedicated event parking areas separate to public parking
- No 'on the day entry'
- Different routes to previous years that avoid locations popular with the public

Previous guidance about social distancing meant that there were risks for event participants and the general public when using the narrow sections of The Ridgeway. The sections where a 2m passing distance is constrained are listed on the online interactive map (look for

yellow warning triangles) and on the news webpage of our website:

https://www.nationaltrail.co.uk/en_GB/trails/the-ridgeway/news/. Following changes in government guidance around social distancing, the highest risk areas of the Trail are gates due to them being pinchpoints and surfaces that lots of people touch.

There is also specific guidance for heritage settings. This relates to several locations along The Ridgeway and may affect how landowners respond to enquiries from event organisers: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/working-safely-during-coronavirus-covid-19/heritage-locations>.

The implications of events upon local businesses including pubs, cafes, shops, hotels, B&Bs etc also need to be considered. Events could help bring much-needed footfall to these businesses but it is important not to overwhelm them.

Restrictions on size of event

The change in guidance on 23rd July makes outdoor exercise events involving more than 30 people possible, providing it has been risk assessed correctly regarding social distancing guidelines. See the 'Large gatherings' section here: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/working-safely-during-coronavirus-covid-19/providers-of-grassroots-sport-and-gym-leisure-facilities?>.

Legislation behind restrictions on gatherings is provided here - The Health Protection (Coronavirus, Restrictions) (No. 2) (England) Regulations 2020: <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukxi/2020/684/regulation/5/made>

As well as what is legally possible, it is also essential to judge what numbers you can feasibly manage successfully bearing in mind the complications and risks created by Covid 19. Social distancing makes increases in numbers of people present/moving in an area problematic. Local communities, particularly people living and working near the event route, will be more 'sensitive' than previous years to people gathering or circulating in their locality. Communications and relations with local residents and stakeholders is therefore particularly important for larger events or more 'visible' events – see below for tips regarding event communications.

Travel and parking for events

Guidance on travel suggests event participants could travel any distance to take part in events and that all forms of transport should be considered before using public transport: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/coronavirus-covid-19-safer-travel-guidance-for-passengers>. Sharing lifts in cars is still advised against, so this will give rise to more cars per person at events. Car parking areas along the Trail are marked on the Ridgeway's online map under Transport – note that some are relatively small and there are larger car parks in nearby towns. Some events hire fields, school grounds and sports centres for dedicated event parking.

Car parking areas are places at risk of crowding. Parking that risks crowding along the Trail will not be supported by the Ridgeway Officer. Even if your event can be done at a time that suits your participants and you offer a long window of dates for people to do your event, a large number of participants may happen to choose to park or use a section of Trail at the same time and this may lead to crowding, particularly if the general public also decide to go to the Trail that day. We need to know where you are advising people to park and ask you to liaise with whoever manages the car park area.

Keeping event participants safe during Covid-19

When it comes to the safety of your event, we require suitable insurance and insist you send your event details to the relevant SAGs (Safety Advisory Groups) for the Ridgeway. This is more important than ever because people's safety (your participants and those of general public in the area) is a hot topic currently and emergency services are busy managing the impacts of the pandemic.

Events will involve different risks and place different demands upon emergency services, e.g. remote parts of the Trail to which only air ambulance can access an injured person. The current circumstances may mean the fitness or experience of a participant has a bearing on whether it is appropriate for them to do your event this year, especially if you are not providing the usual support of checkpoints and on-site medical assistance etc.

A risk assessment should review pinchpoints, including gates, along the Trail event route to gather details and consider options to avoid/minimise these risks.

All organisers are reviewing the briefing material they give to participants. What is in your briefing packs to the participants about keeping safe – Covid and more generally? How are you supporting them in adhering to government guidance around social distancing whilst they are on the Trail, e.g. guidance about 1-2m rule, avoiding contact with others in the event, touching gates etc? Obviously all participants with symptoms of coronavirus should be told not go out on to the Trail and follow government guidance etc, bearing in mind how tempting it is to finish off an outstanding leg or meet a target etc.

Some organisers are changing their mandatory items such as including sanitiser and a face mask, gloves to be worn when opening gates, and to carry larger quantities of food and water.

Virtual events and events where participants are choosing to do an activity in their own time means that the support that would usually be provided on an event day is no longer there in some cases (e.g. marshals, drinking stations). Insurers and SAGs are best placed to comment on whether this covers organiser responsibilities towards participant safety. As a minimum, participants should be provided with some guidance on doing a risk assessment if you are expecting them to do one themselves. Some Ridgeway-specific hazards are listed in the appendix as a starting point to add to any generic list event organisers might have, as well as a list of hospitals near the Trail. Organisers need to think about how their participants can cope without the usual support and organisation – for example, an organiser would cancel an event if it was thought the weather posed a significant risk of heat exhaustion, for example, but what will your participant organising themselves do?

Event communications and public image of your event

There are sensitivities this year, as you can imagine. It is more important than ever to understand and have good relations with local communities who may feel nervous about lots of people coming into their area or passing their home. One bad experience or bad press could make things difficult for other events and for the future longterm so it is important that all events take relations with local people and stakeholders seriously.

There are also local businesses who may welcome extra footfall in their area. Events have the potential to help boost the local economy but these businesses are also operating under constraints so sharing information about events is important to help them manage demand and customer expectations. Many businesses are delivering an adapted offer so event organisers cannot assume that what was available in previous years will be available during

Covid restrictions. The Ridgeway Officer shares information about events, such as the events calendar, with local tourism businesses to assist co-ordinated working.

How people perceive your event will be particularly important during Covid 19, especially how they perceive you to be managing people's safety and the reasons/justifications for the event taking place during a pandemic. Review what information or image you convey to the public via signs on the Trail, your website, event posters etc. If you raise money for a 'good cause', especially a local charity, it is probably worth emphasising this to attract support from local people.

Consider how your participants will portray an 'image' of your event whilst they are on the Trail and how you can work with participants to ensure a positive image is presented. Will your participants be readily identifiable and how will they respond if a member of the public challenges them?

There are many communities along The Ridgeway who produce newsletters and have social media accounts so it is especially worthwhile this year to pass on messages about events through these channels, as well as using local press.

The Ridgeway social media platforms, website and newsletter can help spread details and positive messages about events. A newsletter is planned for August which will include an article about events in September onwards. The most recent Ridgeway newsletter in May stated:

Whilst we can't enjoy the usual programme of events on the Trail currently, event organisers are working with us to develop plans to bring the fun of events back to the Trail when it is safe to do so. As per government guidance, events listed in the Ridgeway calendar between now and September have been cancelled or postponed to later in the year. We wait to see what events can go ahead from September onwards; event organisers are working hard to keep their participants informed and motivated and to adapt to the changing circumstances. The return of events to The Ridgeway will be very much part of our 'recovery' – events support people's wellbeing, raise money for good causes and inspire the team spirit and endurance that Covid19 has brought out in lots of us. Events on The Ridgeway in future will probably be different to what we are used to but they can still be great. We will need to start gently and slowly to accommodate the constraints and sensitivities that Covid19 has created, but this situation will make us savour the simple opportunity to be out on the Trail with others. We will just have to try to keep fit in the meantime!

Appendix

Further resources to help event organisers

A checklist of things to consider and some useful pointers from International Trail Running Association. Some of it is directed more at large events but it's useful for small events too: <https://itra.run/documents/ITRA%20COVID-19%20GUIDELINES%20-%20EN.pdf>

Covid guidance for road race and multi-terrain race organisers from UK Athletics and Run Britain: <https://www.runbritain.com/covid-19-uk-road-race-guidance>

Covid event resources from British Cycling:

<https://www.britishcycling.org.uk/workforce/article/20141110-workforce-Event-support-and-resources-0>

Safety Advisory Group contacts

SAG area	Contact email
Dacorum	SafetyAdvisoryGroup@dacorum.gov.uk
Aylesbury Vale	licensing@aylesburyvaledc.gov.uk
Wycombe	neil.stannett@wycombe.gov.uk
South & Vale	events@southandvale.gov.uk
West Berkshire	licensing@westberks.gov.uk
Swindon	TBC
Wiltshire	kevin.oliver@wiltshire.gov.uk

Starting point list of safety hazards specific to Ridgeway

- Loose dogs (from farms as well as Trail users).
- Areas without mobile phone reception
- Horse riders, mountain bikers, runners, walkers, disabled ramblers in motorised scooters – some in groups, cyclists on footpaths possible
- Mud bikes (motorbikes), 4x4, tractors etc – some illegal – mainly along tracks in the Downs; parking areas
- Level crossing near Saunderton – high speed trains
- Road crossings and road stretches, many without provision for pedestrians – rural but busy/fast minor roads as well as busy A roads; crossings where there is poor visibility due to bends in road; no pavements (including stretch over M4)
- Damaged Trail surface, including extensive wheel ruts – check Ridgeway online map for major sections of damage (yellow warning triangle)
- Narrow sections not conducive to social distancing – check Ridgeway online map (yellow warning triangle)
- Cattle in fields crossed by Trail
- Exposed chalk – slippery when wet
- Exposed locations – previous events have suffered dehydration, heat exhaustion etc in summer
- Riverside

Hospitals near The Ridgeway

Note that the following information should be checked to ensure it is still accurate, particularly opening times.

Type	Name	Address	Post-code	Phone	Opening times
Minor injuries	Devizes Community Hospital	New Park Rd, Devizes, Wilts	SN10 1EF	01380 723511	Mon-Thurs 8.30-17.00, Fri 8.30-16.30
A&E Open 24 hours	The Great Weston Hospital	Marlborough Rd, Swindon	SN3 6BB	01793 604020	Open 24 hours
A&E Open 24 hours	Oxford - John Radcliffe Hospital	Headley way, Headington, Oxon	OX3 9DU	01865 741166	Open 24 hours
Minor Injuries	Abingdon Hospital,	Marcham Road, Abingdon, Oxon	OX14 1AG	01865 904346	TBC
Walk in centre / Urgent care	West Berkshire Community Hospital	London Road, Benham Hill Thatcham, Berkshire	RG18 3AS	01635 273300	TBC
A&E Open 24 hours	Reading - Royal Berkshire Hospital	London Road, Craven Road, Reading, Berkshire	RG1 5AN	0118 322 5111	Open 24 hours
Walk in centre /Urgent care	Reading	1St Floor 103 Broad Street Mall Reading, Berkshire	RG1 7QA	0118 902 8300	TBC
First Aid Unit	Wallingford Hospital	Reading Road, Wallingford, Oxon	OX10 9DU	01865 425200	Mon - Fri 8.30 – 18.30
Walk in centre / Open 24 hours	Wycombe Hospital	Queen Alexandra Road High Wycombe Buckinghamshire	HP11 2TT	01494 526 161	Open 24 hours
A&E Open 24 hours	Aylesbury - Stoke Mandeville Hospital	Mandeville Rd, Aylesbury, Bucks	HP21 8AL	01296 315000	Open 24 hours
A&E Open 24 hours	Luton and Dunstable Hospital	Lewsey Road Luton Bedfordshire	LU4 0DZ	01582 491166	Open 24 hours