

A Potential Pilgrim Trail of St Andrew

Background

The St Andrew's Trail is part of a project to develop the Dundry Slopes area above the relatively deprived area of Hartcliffe/Withywood into a resource for the community. The area was drawn to my attention because the footpaths that go through this area had been blocked through historical neglect by Bristol City Council and its predecessor.

The clearance of the path by the Parks Department at the urging of myself and the local neighbourhood partnership led to the development of a path between the St Andrew's Scout Hut on Bishport Avenue and St Andrew's Church in Chew Magna, with a return route to St Andrew's Church in Hartcliffe, which we walked on 8th May.

This route is to be written up and mapped for the neighbourhood partnership once a few problems have been ironed out by the PROW teams on either side of the county boundary.

As part of this project, shorter routes are also being developed, some of which will be mapped and marked and others will be more informal on council owned land.

Some ideas of how the latter might be accomplished are included here.

Dundry Slopes Wayfaring Zone?

Some proposals for managing the interface between urban and agricultural zones with particular reference to Wayfaring and changes in vegetation in the absence of agriculture

Wayfaring is "the most fundamental mode by which living beings, both human and non-human inhabit the earth." (Tim Ingold; Professor of Anthropology at Aberdeen University in *Lines – a Brief History* 2007)

By a weird coincidence, I first heard about Wayfaring as a concept while out on Dundry Slopes with Hartcliffe resident, Keith Way and Helen Burgess an MA student in Art, Media and Design at the University of the West of England. Following Tim Ingold, Helen pointed out that Wayfaring is what Keith Way does – exploring the hillside by following footsteps made by the footsteps of others and preserving the paths by adding his footsteps to theirs. That is how all paths are made when we are not constrained by land management considerations. Such paths used to exist in many of the open spaces that used to surround most cities such as the Strays round York.

However, not all the Wayfaring in the Dundry Slopes Wayfaring Zone is benign. The nature of the boundary between the area where Wayfaring is permissible and the surrounding agricultural zone is not as clear from the urban side as it is to the agricultural landowner, which can lead to conflict as people stray onto fields that are being used for pasture, for example.

Also, there is evidence that some people go onto Dundry Slopes to make fires and enjoy barbecues. There are places where it safe to have a barbecue, such as the spring

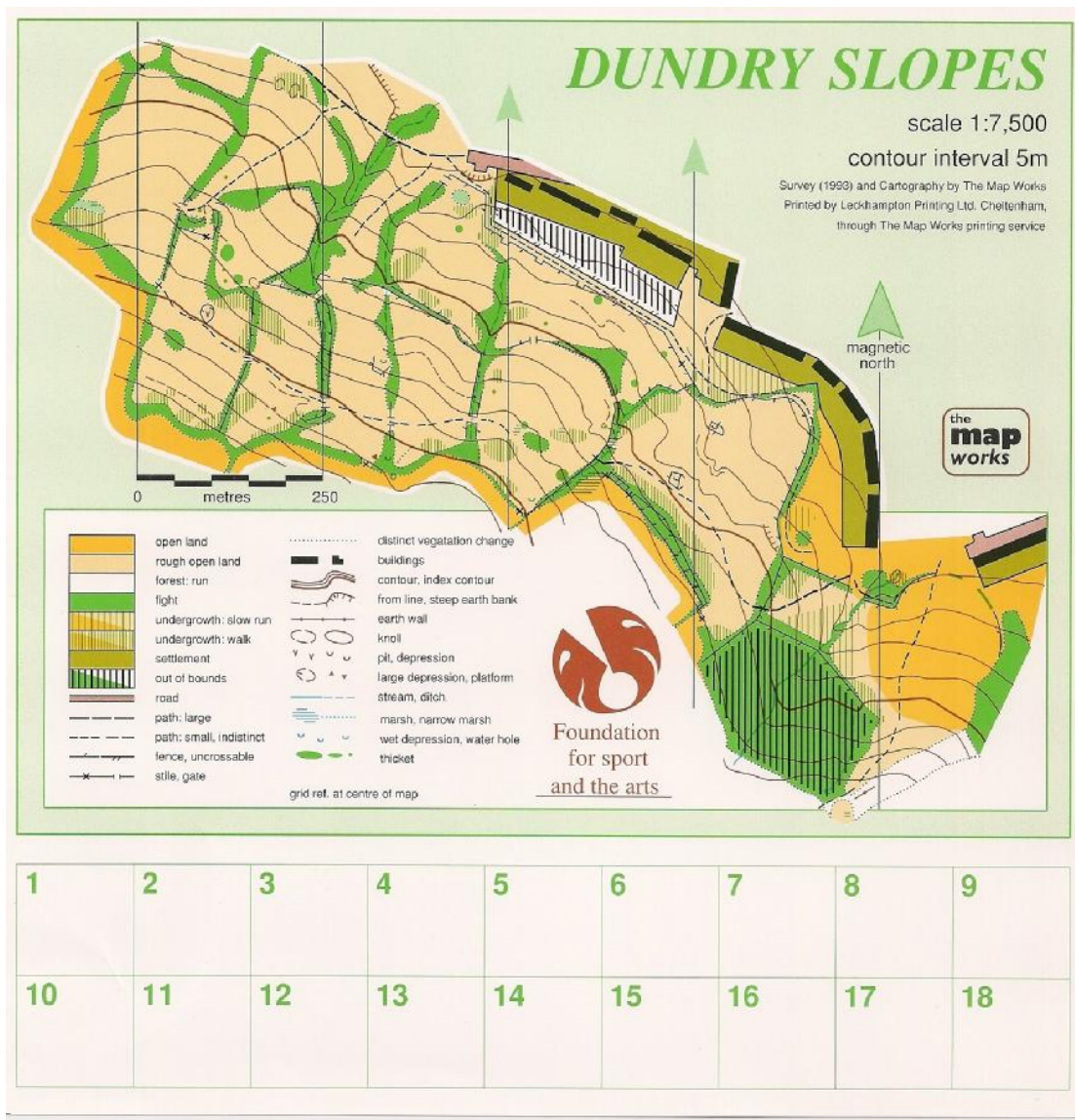
that is the official source of the Malago Stream. And several fires that have been made have been contained in well constructed fire pits. However, However, here as elsewhere, dangerous fires have been started that have caused damage.

Everyone would benefit if the boundaries between zones were better defined and if people knew how the rules changed in passing from one zone to another.

Natural Progression

The Dundry Slopes area has become a place where Wayfaring is possible, because it is not being managed for agriculture any more. This has made the slopes less accessible in some ways, while access has been improved in other ways. We can see how things have changed if we look at an old orienteering map.

In 1993, Bristol Orienteering Klub produced this orienteering map of the slopes, which, unlike other kinds of map, shows vegetation. Orienteering is a kind of competitive Wayfaring, in which competitors find their way between “control points” that are flagged in one way or another and are equipped with a means of marking a card, which in this case is included with the map.



This orienteering map is useful to us because it shows how the area has changed since it was surveyed in 1993. Because orienteering is about route choices, orienteering maps are mainly concerned with how easy it is to run across the land.

Since orienteering was invented in Sweden, the main categories of land shown on orienteering maps are forest and open land. Forest is shown on such maps in white if you can run through it or dark green if you have to fight to get through. Forests usually contain intermediate types of going where you have to run slowly or walk, but there were no woods of this kind on Dundry Slopes in 1993, so they have not been included in the key. Open spaces are shown in orange – dark orange for areas of short grass, pale orange for rough open land. Areas of undergrowth on the open land are shown by vertical olive green lines – widely spaced for “slow run” and closely spaced if you would be reduced to a walk.

During the last seventeen years, the area has changed fundamentally. The most obvious change is that now many of the easiest paths, where runners might actually run, follow the linear woods – formerly hedges – which are shown dark green for “fight” on the map. What has happened is that the canopy layer of the trees and shrubs is now sufficiently developed to shade out encroaching briars. At the same time, because the fields are no longer grazed, brambles and nettles have rendered the former pasture more or less inaccessible to Wayfarers. If the map were updated, many of the thickets marked in dark green should now be rendered in white, and most of the rough open ground should be hatched in to show undergrowth.

Management

The management regime on the Dundry Slopes tends to support Wayfaring, because the policy seems to be to clear “desire lines.” “Desire Line” is an official term for a Wayfaring Path as opposed to a Public Right of Way (PROW). Working with rather than against “desire lines” is a good idea, because it is a way of responding to the wishes of users who “vote with their feet!”

However, there are some overriding considerations. For example, the duty to keep Public Rights of Way open is a statutory and common law duty and should be the first priority of all relevant agents of the council.

Nevertheless, it is right that the slopes should be managed in a way that supports people who actually use the Slopes. However, management needs to be more proactive. The transformation of hedges into woodland has been beneficial to wayfarers by allowing more routes to open up, but the decay of the barbed wire fences that went with them has left dangerous remains that could cause quite serious injury as could abandoned farm machinery, of which I have found two examples.

It is important that unnecessary barbed wire should be removed, because it is a danger to the general public, and there is no excuse for keeping it in place if there is no agricultural purpose to be served by retaining it. (The same goes for abandoned agricultural machinery.) Anyone injured by barbed wire (or abandoned machinery) whilst wayfaring on the Slopes would surely be entitled to claim damages from the council.

Removing unnecessary barbed wire would also have two other benefits. Firstly, it would make the informal footpaths through the emerging woodland easier to use (as well as safer). Secondly, it would help to clarify for the general public where they are allowed to go. This is particularly important next to agricultural land, where a barbed

wire fence not only controls cattle, but it also signals to Wayfarers places where they should not go. Dangerous and unnecessary obstructions on public open space confuse the issue. On the other hand signs and interpretive panels reinforce clear demarcation of different zones.

The former rough open spaces are also a problem. One approach would be to mow them regularly, which could be expensive. Secondly, it might be possible to introduce some animals, such as pigs to clear the brambles etc, which would involve the use of temporary electric fencing, or thirdly, trees might be planted to shade out the nettles and brambles. If these were fruit trees, they would also attract people onto the Slopes to pick the fruit, which would also help to keep the vegetation at bay.

The council is under some obligation to encourage public health by encouraging people to take exercise out of doors. Well placed picnic sites on the Slopes are another way to encourage beneficial use, especially if accompanied by properly constructed barbecues and fire pits, which would have the additional advantage of channelling existing uses, and encourage people to clear up the dead wood that encourages people to set fires under the trees.

Summary

Management should:

- 1) Ensure that public rights of way are kept clear and accessible;
- 2) Support Wayfaring by keeping desire lines open;
- 3) Improve access by removing dangerous obstructions to Wayfaring such as barbed wire and clearing paths and inhibiting growth of obstructing brambles and nettles by planting trees;
- 4) Clarify zoning by removing unnecessary barriers and by the use of signs and interpretive panels etc;
- 5) Encourage public health by establishing destinations within the Wayfaring Zone, such as fruit trees, picnic areas and barbecues.

Extension

A related concept is that of “spreading room” that has been defined in relation to the land between the proposed coastal path in the Marine and Coastal Access Act 2009 as the area between the proposed National Coastal Path and the sea, where the public will have the right to wander and picnic, subject to certain safeguards.

Wayfaring Zones, of which the Dundry Slopes area is a representative sample could work in the same way. In Bristol, the Community Forest Path follows the urban fringe in much the same way that the Coastal Path will follow the shoreline. In an ideal world, the Wayfaring Zone would occupy the area between the Community Forest Path and the urban boundary, just as Spreading Room will fill the space between the Coastal Path and the shoreline. Of course, in practice, the line of the Community Forest Path would have to be changed in consultation with agricultural landowners, if this were to happen, but all parties would benefit from the greater clarity that would

emerge about rights of obligations on the urban fringe if such a consultation should take place.

Extension of the Trail

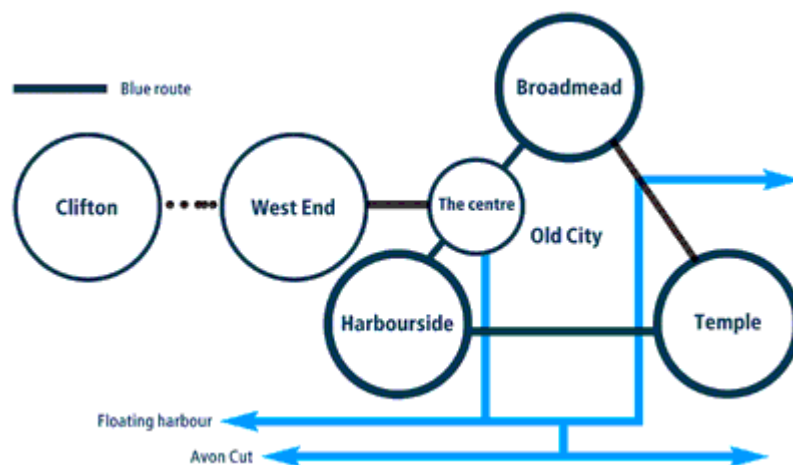
From the start, the Gateway was conceived as a link between the Malago Greenway, which begins in Victoria Park and the countryside. This needs a different approach in the urban and rural parts of the proposed trail. In the urban area, public transport is relatively good, but awareness of the potential for reaching the countryside on foot is poor. The opposite is the case in the countryside.

The Urban Zone

From the point of view of the St Andrew's Trail, the Urban Zone is the stretch between the New Cut at the Banana Bridge between St Mary Redcliffe School and Barts Spices and Bishport Avenue in Hartcliffe.

In this Zone the Trail goes from the Banana Bridge, through Victoria Park, along the Malago Greenway along the new pedestrian/cycleway alongside Hartcliffe Way, through Wilmott Park to the proposed St Andrew's Gateway. This section is virtually without problems on the ground, apart from the problem of signage.

At first, the Bristol Legible City Project looked like the answer to the signage problem, but a presentation by Nathaniel Robertson to the Bristol City Public Rights of Way Liaison Group meeting on 10th June 2010, suggests that this might be premature.



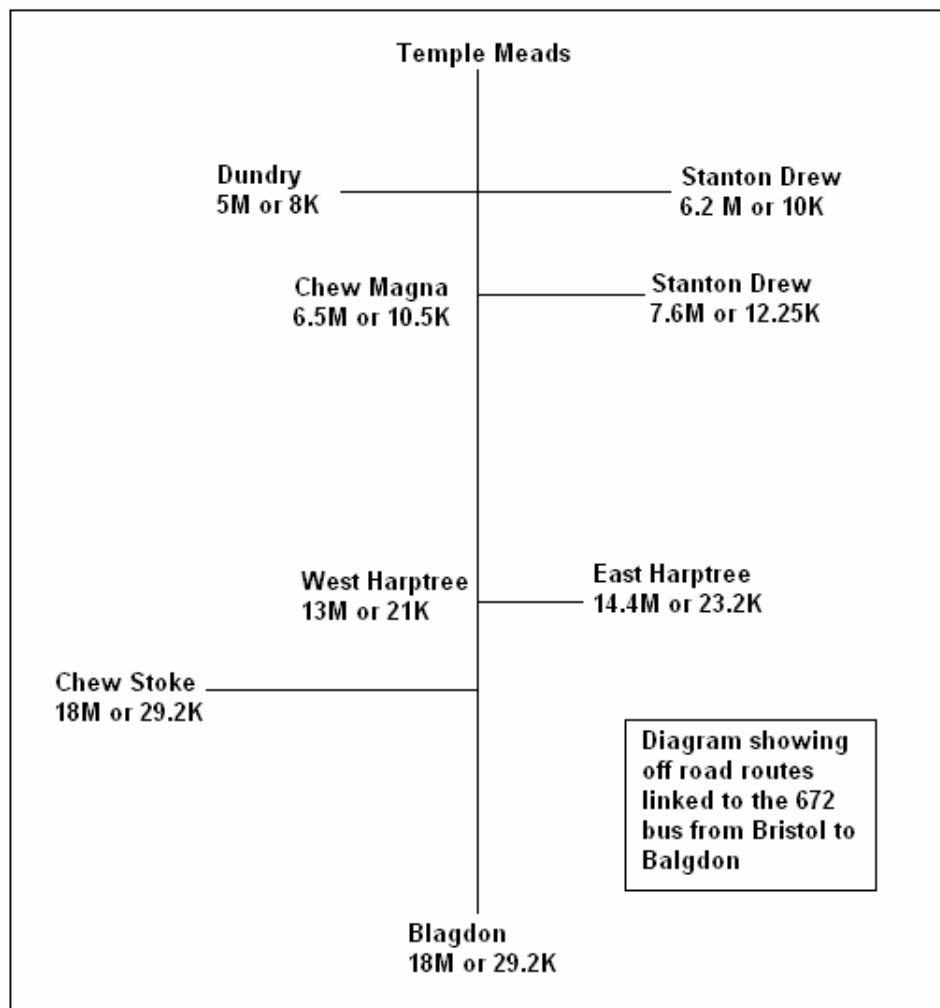
As can be seen from this diagram, which comes from the Legible City Website, the City that is Legible is a very limited concept, being very similar in extent to the City of Bristol that was fought over during the English Civil War – perhaps slightly less.

The expansion of Bristol following the 1890 Housing Act and the building of the trams is not taken into consideration, let alone the expansion brought about by the motor car and the building up of the suburbs following the Second World War. Instead we have a tourist Bristol or Bristol for students and visitors from the suburbs. It is a vision of Bristol that looks exclusive as opposed to inclusive, and represents a city that I – supposedly living in the City – rarely visit. I wonder what proportion of the citizens of Bristol visit the Legible City on a regular basis?

The challenge offered to the St Andrew's Trail is to link the Legible City to the wider City and to place it in the context of the surrounding countryside on which it ultimately depends. Funding is likely to be a problem.

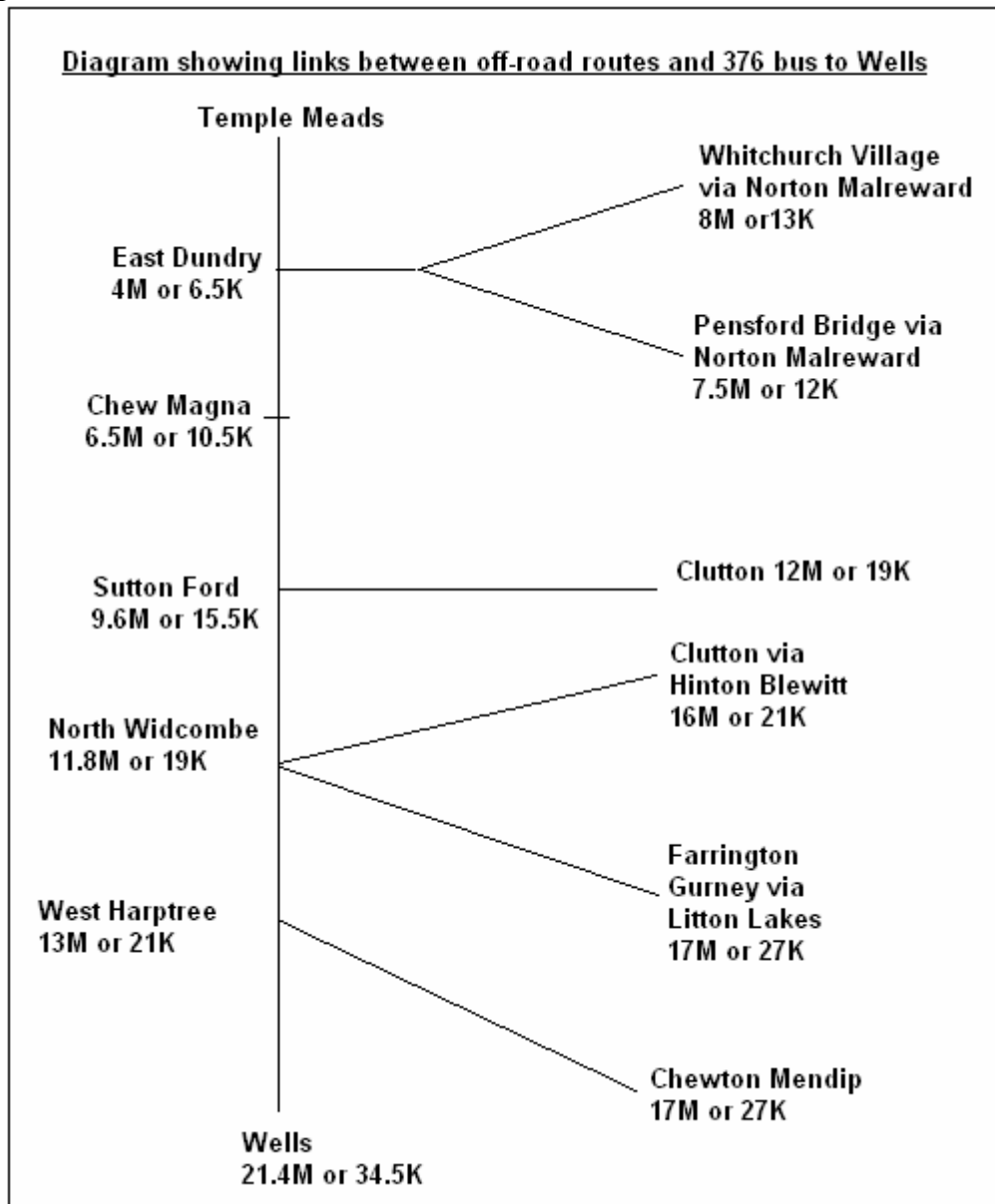
The Rural Zone

My first aim was to link the St Andrew's Trail to the proposed route around Chew Valley Lake, which seemed appropriate to a trail dedicated to the Patron Saint of Fishermen., and I came up with a route that circled the lake and finished in Chew Stoke (whose Church is dedicated to St Andrew). However, it soon became clear that the local bus timetable would not work well for a walker intending to use the path to walk out of the city and catch a bus back. The only possibility seemed to be the Number 672 bus, whose vagueries soon made it clear that this bus was more suitable for getting out to Blagdon and walking back to Bristol from there. (The church in Blagdon is also dedicated to St Andrew). This was not ideal. The problem is that the bus service is structured from the point of view of an operator local to Blagdon for people wanting to get into Bristol in the morning and returning from Bristol in the afternoon.



A note on an afternoon bus stopping at West Harptree drew attention to another bus route – the 376 between Bristol and Wells, which turned out to be a much more robust service. The 376 allows a number of walks into the countryside from 8 to 21 miles

long with regular half hourly or hourly return bus rides from villages that still have pubs, as far as I know and from Wells.



The Cathedral Church of St Andrew in Wells has not always been a cathedral. It was founded by King Ine of Wessex and St Aldhelm of Malmesbury in 705AD as the Minster Church of St Andrew next to the eponymous wells, which makes it one of the oldest Christian sites in England. It turns out that the reason that so many of churches in Somerset are dedicated to St Andrew (at least twelve) is because they are (or were) in the diocese of Bath and Wells, which makes Wells a very suitable destination for St Andrew's Trail and a potential Pilgrimage Trail from St Mary Redcliffe, which stands near the beginning of the Malago Greenway.