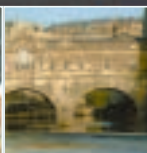































River Avon Trail *guide*

+5
*circular
walks*



Pill - Avon Gorge - Bristol - Bath

Key to map sections

	River Avon Trail - Walking
	River Avon Trail - Walking & Cycling
	River Avon Trail - Walking, Cycling & Horseriding
	Loop Walks
	Intersecting Paths
	Motorway
	A Road
	B Road
	Minor Road
	Lane
	Track
	Railway
	Public House
	Church, Chapel
	Telephone
	Buildings
	Ponds, Streams, Rivers
	Built-up Areas
	Parks / Open Spaces
	Woodland
	Trees
	Viewpoint
	Station
	Museum
	Information Centre
	Bus Stop
	Ferry stop
	Parking
	Information Board

Welcome

This booklet aims to provide you with a comprehensive guide to the 23 mile River Avon Trail.



The Trail, which used to be known as the Avon Walkway, has been upgraded so that much of it can now be used by cyclists, as well as walkers. The section between Conham and Hanham is a public bridlepath, permitting horse riding.

The River Avon Trail is described here from west to east but it can just as easily be walked in the other direction, or in sections. Many connecting paths and trails can also be accessed from the route.

The Trail passes through the historic harbour village of Pill, the spectacular Avon Gorge, the modern city and ancient port of Bristol, the beautiful countryside where the Avon Valley meets the Cotswold Hills and ends at the famous Pulteney Bridge in the Georgian city of Bath. Although the Trail goes no further, the river continues upstream to its source near Sherston in the Cotswold Hills.

The Avon is a fascinating river. It was the great highway of the area, stimulating trade and industry. The river corridor has a complex geology and offers a rich and varied environment for wildlife, containing some unique species.

For further information about the River Avon Trail, please visit www.riveravontrail.org.uk

To ask questions or post top tips on the website please email: info@riveravontrail.org.uk

Tel: 0117 953 2141

Ordnance Survey Explorer maps 154 & 155 cover the length of the Trail.

www.riveravontrail.org.uk

Supported by the
Heritage Lottery Fund



Not just for walkers...

Cycling in the Avon Valley

Much of the Trail coincides with the National Cycle Network (Routes 3 and 41) and can mostly be cycled from Pill to Hanham. The individual map pages show where you will need to walk your bike, take a diversion or exercise extra caution where bank erosion is under-cutting the path or improvements are needed. You can easily connect with the Bristol & Bath Railway Path to continue to Bath.

Horse Riding in the Avon Valley

Horse riding is currently limited to the public bridlepath section of the Trail between Conham and Hanham. The newly designated Avon Valley Woodlands Local Nature Reserve borders much of this section. The woodlands are subject to a number of proposals for improving wildlife and amenity value. It is hoped that as part of this work, an additional permissive bridlepath can be established to create a horse riding circuit in this area.

Wheelchairs and Pushchairs

Some sections of the River Avon Trail are suitable for people using wheelchairs or pushchairs. There are three locations in particular where you can enjoy a trip along the river:

Conham River Park

Disabled parking and toilets available. From here you can head south along the riverside to Beese's Tea gardens (summer only) via Conham Ferry and admire the surrounding woodlands and fields. The route can be wet and muddy in winter.

The Avon Gorge

There are several car parks at the west end of Cumberland Road in Bristol which provide easy access to the River Avon Trail via the CREATE Centre car park. There are then good quality paths along the river through Brunel Way Picnic Park. You can continue along the edge of Leigh Woods for wonderful views of the Clifton Suspension Bridge and the Avon Gorge. One steep ramp exists at the north-west end of the Park.

Bath

Much of the Trail can be visited as there are a number of ramped access points and the route itself is over one metre wide with good quality surfaces.

Getting There

Public Transport

The Trail can be reached from train stations at Bristol Temple Meads, Bath and Keynsham. For details:

Tel: 08457 484950 or visit: www.nationalrail.co.uk

Ferry boat companies operate regular and occasional services, mainly from the Bristol Harbour area:

Bristol Ferry Boat Co: 0117 908 3121

or visit: www.bristolferryboat.co.uk

The Bristol Packet: 0117 926 8157

or visit: www.bristolpacket.co.uk

Main bus stops are marked on individual map pages.

For bus information contact Traveline: 0870 608 2608 or visit: www.traveline.org.uk

Refreshments & Facilities

There are no facilities in the Avon Gorge, between Temple Meads Station and Conham or between Saltford and Newbridge. There are cafes and eateries close to the Trail in Pill, Bristol and Bath, and pubs at Hanham, Keynsham and Saltford. Places to stop along the other sections are marked on the separate map pages.



The River and the Tides

At Avonmouth the difference between high and low tide can be as much as 40 feet (12.3 metres) – the second highest tidal range in the world. With each rising tide enormous volumes of water push into the mouth of the river from the Bristol Channel, only to flow out again a few hours later.

Once the tides pushed all the way up to Bath, the river rising and falling with every tide. But the construction of a number of mills, with weirs across the river, in the 13th century impeded both the tides and trade along the river between Bristol and Bath.

Today the river is tidal as far as the Netham Weir close to St Anne's on the eastern edge of Bristol. This barrage can be overtopped by very high tides.

The village of Pill was famous for the skill of its pilots, who used their knowledge of the tides and currents of the Bristol Channel to guide ships safely to the mouth of the Avon.

But the journey up the river to Bristol was no less arduous. Ships had to be towed upriver on the rising tide and safely moored before the ebb. At low tide ships had to rest on the river bed. The journey for a ship being towed from Pill to Bristol could take a week.



left & right: Pill Creek at low and high tide - looking across the Avon to Shirehampton.

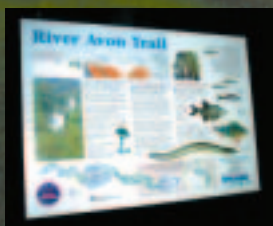
below left: Complex patterns in the mud created by the flux of the tide.



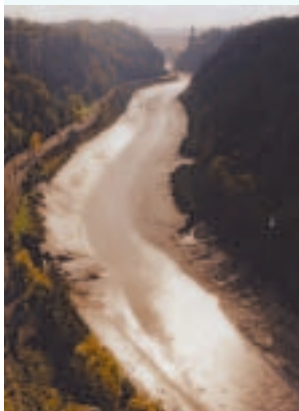
below: Oystercatcher - low tide is a busy time for wading birds who search for molluscs and worms in the mud.



Looking down Pill Creek towards the Lamplighters pub on the Shirehampton side. When pub closing time was half an hour earlier in Gloucestershire than it was in Somerset, a regular contingent from Shirehampton took the ferry to Pill for a last drink. The ferry was often so crowded that the passengers had to sway to give the ferryman room to row.



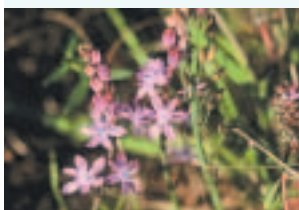
left: Read more local stories on the 15 interpretation boards along the River Avon Trail. The boards reveal more of the heritage, wildlife, geology and legends surrounding this historic waterway.



above: The Avon Gorge in forbidding mood.

below: Scurvy grass – a common plant that flourishes in salty conditions. Once it was valued as a remedy for scurvy and gathered to be taken on sea voyages - it contains vitamin C.

bottom: The rare autumn squill. When Brunel was told that the building of his suspension bridge threatened a colony of these plants he arranged for them to be removed to a safer location.



Avon Gorge

Why is there a gorge here at all? There would seem to be far easier ways for the Avon to reach the sea.

It is thought that the river was diverted from its original course by walls of ice which were formed during the Ice Ages.

Blocked by ice and high ground the river wore its way through hard limestone and sandstone rocks – making the Gorge. In so doing it created a unique habitat.

right: Peregrine falcons have returned to hunt and breed in the Gorge.



The Gorge has a micro-climate that is a degree or so warmer than the surrounding landscape. The steep rocky slopes of the Gorge have preserved this unique wilderness at the edge of a busy city.

Species of plants have survived in the isolated wooded and grassy areas of the Gorge that have either disappeared or are very rare this far north (such as the autumn squill – below left). Others have continued to evolve in the isolation of the Gorge, so that they are now unique versions of their species.



Gateway to Bristol

The Avon Gorge and the river's tides provided the early city of Bristol with natural protection. Any invader would be hopelessly vulnerable and probably get stuck trying to reach the city by coming up the river.

But as ships got larger, serious accidents, such as the one below, became more frequent. Wrecks could block the river for months, threatening the viability of the port.

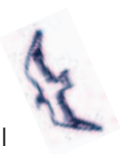
above: Labour of a lifetime – Brunel won the competition to design the Clifton Suspension Bridge in 1831, when he was only 25. But it was not begun until 1836 and then after further delays, not completed until 1864, five years after Brunel's death. This painting from Samuel Jackson's sketchbook celebrates Bristol's most famous view.

below: The wreck of the Gypsy in 1878, wedged across the river, her back broken by the tide.



Bristol

The medieval port and city of Bristol grew rich exporting English wool and woollen cloth to Europe. The principal import was wine from France.



By the mid 18th century, the patterns of trade had changed and Bristol was prospering on trade with West Africa, the West Indies and North America.

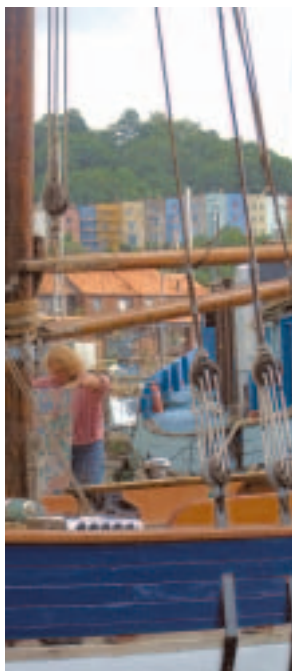
Brassware produced in the Bristol area, as well as other goods, were traded in Africa for 'enslaved' people. They were taken across the Atlantic to work on the sugar, cotton and tobacco plantations of the New World. These commodities had a ready market in Europe.

But the narrow, tidal harbour that made Bristol England's second port began a slow decline. Ships grew larger and trade was lost to other ports.



The opening of the Floating Harbour in 1810 extended the life of the port, but it would never regain its former status.

The port declined rapidly in the late 1960s and closed in 1977. The docks area is now mainly used for recreation and housing.



above, left & below: Black-headed, herring and lesser black-backed gulls all find a living in the harbour area.

above: Dockside cranes such as these listed structures are reminders of the working port.

Find out more about the docks and Bristol's maritime history at Bristol Industrial Museum.





above: The chimney on Troopers Hill, a relic of the copper smelting industry.

The Industrial River

In 1810 the Floating Harbour was opened. Lock gates isolated the docks from the ebb and flow of the tide. The flow of the river was diverted along the New Cut. The Feeder Canal created a new extension to the harbour complex to the east. New areas of land became accessible for commercial and industrial development.

The power of the river had long been exploited by the 30 or so water mills between Bristol and Bath – most of which were in the service of the brass industry in the 18th century. But in the 19th century the new steam-powered technology, utilising the ample supply of local coal, triggered massive industrial development along the Feeder Canal and across St Philip's Marsh.

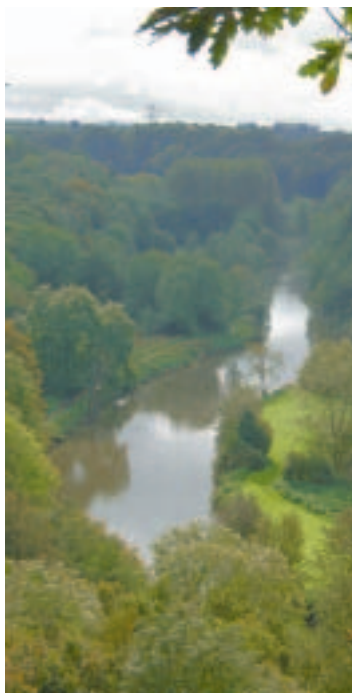
below: The Great Western Locomotive & Wagon Works close to Temple Meads shows the intensity of land use. Besides heavy engineering there were iron, lead, chemical and tar works as well as cotton and board mills in the area.



Avon Valley Woodlands

Regenerated woodland, with other varied habitats make this Local Nature Reserve a haven for wildlife. Trees have reclaimed the quarried rock faces that scarred the steep slopes of the Gorge from Conham to Hanham. The trees also conceal the spoil left by several centuries of copper and brass making activity.

Conham River Park is a good place for a walk, a picnic – or, in summer, take Conham ferry across the river to Beese's Tea Garden and Eastwood Farm. This is another piece of restored land where you can enjoy walks through woods and water meadows to see herons and other water birds.



above: A spectacular view from The Panorama Walk (see p. 21) off the River Avon Trail at Conham.

Look for the tunnel and cuttings built to support Brunel's Great Western Railway near Conham when you hear the rush of modern trains.



left: Saltford Lock was wrecked by local miners in 1738. They felt threatened by the cheaper Shropshire coal brought in along the Avon.



right: Keynsham – The deepest and most dangerous lock on the Trail is No. 2 on the Kennet & Avon Canal.

Avon Navigation

The economic prospects of the area boomed when the stretch of water between Hanham and Bath was opened for navigation. Six locks were built to control the tidal river and conduct boats uphill and upstream to Bath.

The first barge sailed upstream from Hanham in 1727. Almost a century later this lock was to become the first of over 100 on the Kennet & Avon Canal, linking the region with London.

Netham Lock came later in 1809. It forms the eastern end of the Feeder Canal that supplies Bristol's Floating Harbour with fresh water. Netham Weir nearby also holds back the 12 metre tidal reach of the Severn Estuary.

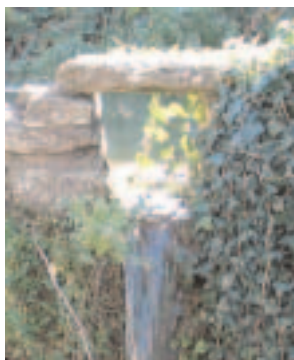


above: Relics of the working river's history – a sign for early motor cars and a mooring bollard among woodland plants.



Cotswold Edge

The northern slopes of the Avon Valley, between Saltford and Bath, form the edge of the Cotswold Hills.



The Cotswold scarp has a long history of use for defence purposes. The earthworks from a series of Iron Age hillforts remain and the Battle of Lansdown took place beyond the scarp in 1643.

Roman presence in the area is marked by sites in both the hills and the Avon Valley at Keynsham and Newton St Loe as well as most famously, at Bath.

The typically English river landscape in the Newbridge area has remained relatively untouched for several centuries, despite road and railway building.



above: The charming Cotswold villages of North Stoke and Kelston are accessible from the River Avon Trail.

left: Cotswold spring-water bound for the River Avon.

below: The copse on top of Kelston Round Hill can be seen for miles. Further west is the site of the Little Down Iron Age hillfort.





above: Robert Adams' famous Pulteney Bridge (1773) was built in one of the area's great exports – Bath Stone.

Bath

Although the Avon continues upstream to its source in the Cotswold Hills, the River Avon Trail ends here. Pulteney Weir is the Head of the Avon Navigation beyond which no boats may pass.

The part the River Avon has played in the success of this famous city has been little recognised.

But as you reach the end of the River Avon Trail, you can still see what little remains of the mills, factories and warehouses of the working city.

below: The Romano-Celtic head from the pediment of the Temple of Sulis Minerva at the Roman Baths, Bath. Geologists think that Bath's spa water may be linked to the now untapped spa water of Hotwells, Bristol.





Route Information:

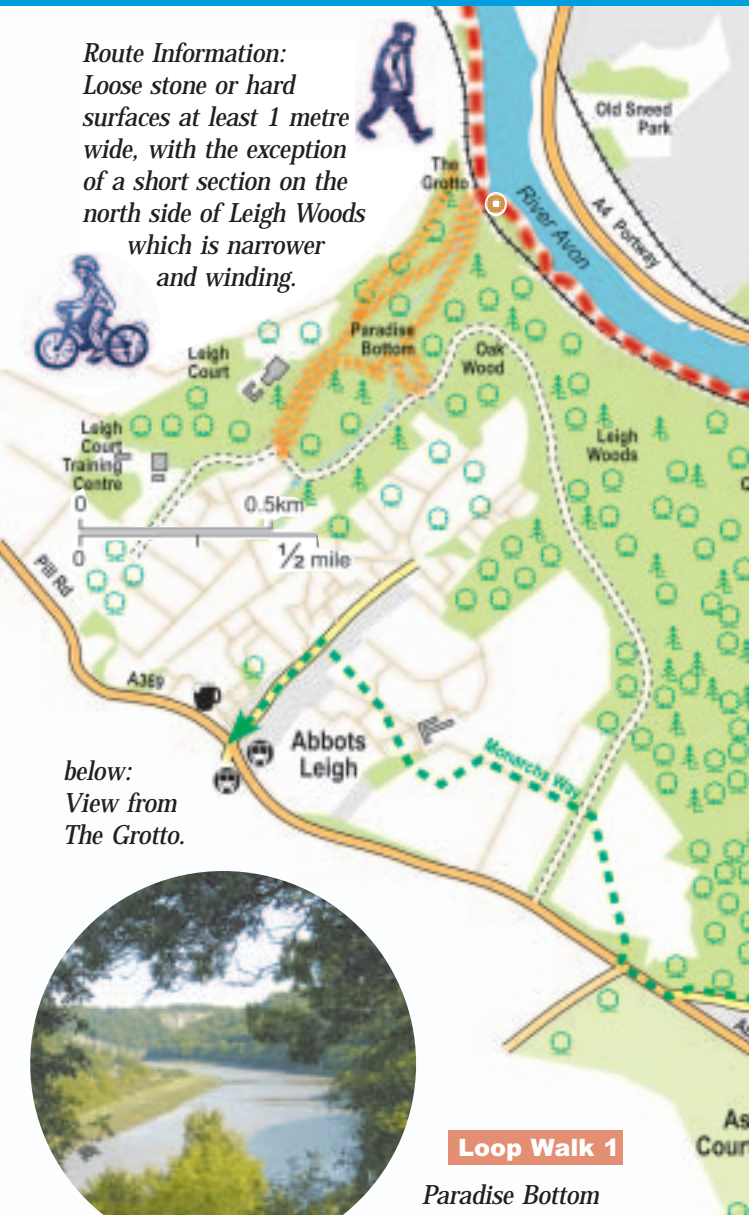
Loose stone or hard surfaces at least 1 metre wide, with the exception of a short section on the north side of Leigh Woods which is narrower and winding.



right: The Powder House. At one time all ships bound for Bristol City Docks had to surrender any gunpowder or other material that might fuel a fire among the wooden ships moored inside the crowded harbour. These materials were stored here – to be reclaimed on the outward journey.



*Route Information:
Loose stone or hard
surfaces at least 1 metre
wide, with the exception
of a short section on the
north side of Leigh Woods
which is narrower
and winding.*



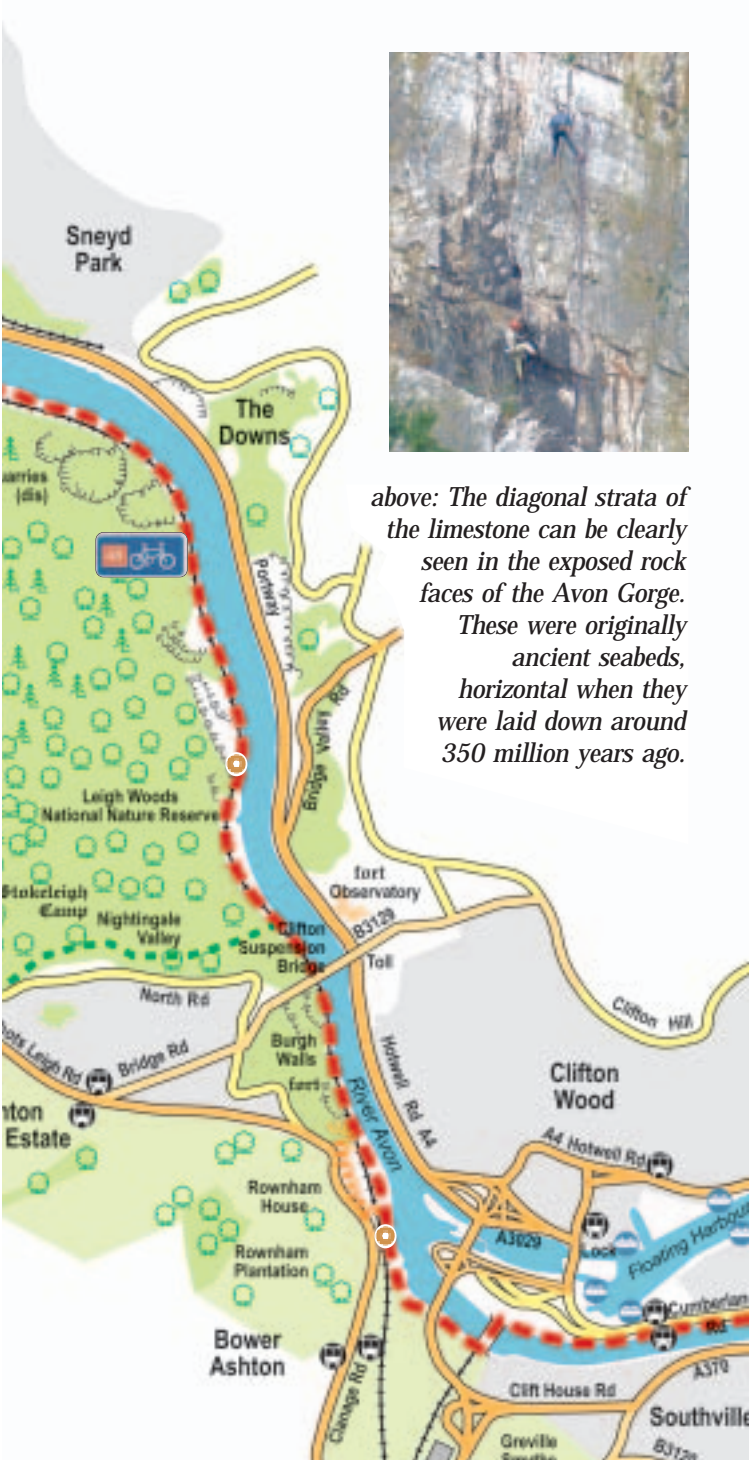
*below:
View from
The Grotto.*



Loop Walk 1

*Paradise Bottom
(2 miles / 3 kms)*

*Enjoy this walk through the
wild and dramatic valley scenery of
Leigh Woods. The woodlands were created in the 19th
century as part of the Leigh Court estate. Close by, and
worth a detour, is The Grotto. The woods have been
sensitively restored and are now sustainably managed.*



above: The diagonal strata of the limestone can be clearly seen in the exposed rock faces of the Avon Gorge. These were originally ancient seabeds, horizontal when they were laid down around 350 million years ago.

Loop Walk 2

*Merchants' Walk
(2 miles / 3 kms)*

This walk follows the streets of the medieval city, visits buildings of the Georgian era, the regenerated dockside warehouses and the place where the city began – Bristol Bridge.



Explore the entrance to the Floating Harbour. The harbour is part of the original course of the Avon – isolated from the ebb and flow of the tides by these lock gates in the early 19th century.

right: Brunel's original swing bridge, built in 1848 – under the modern road bridge.



left: Take the opportunity to visit St Mary Redcliffe - built with the wealth of Bristol's medieval merchants, who had grown rich exporting fine quality English wool and woollen cloth.

right: A long way from home - a fig tree grows out of the harbour wall at the edge of Castle Park. It is thought that the seed may have arrived by ship, over a century ago.



Route Information:

This 4 mile long urban section is all on paths with hard surfaces or pavements.

The route is surprisingly pleasant - as much of it is away from roads - in Bristol's parks or along the historic waterfront. There are steps at Vauxhall Bridge, Castle Park and Temple Meads Station that could be avoided with short diversions.

Cyclists will need to dismount where the Trail passes through Temple Meads Station.





Route Information:

All off-road, on hard surfaces or loose stone paths at least 1 metre wide except between the east end of St Philips Causeway and Netham Park where the path is narrow, poorly defined and overgrown, especially in summer.



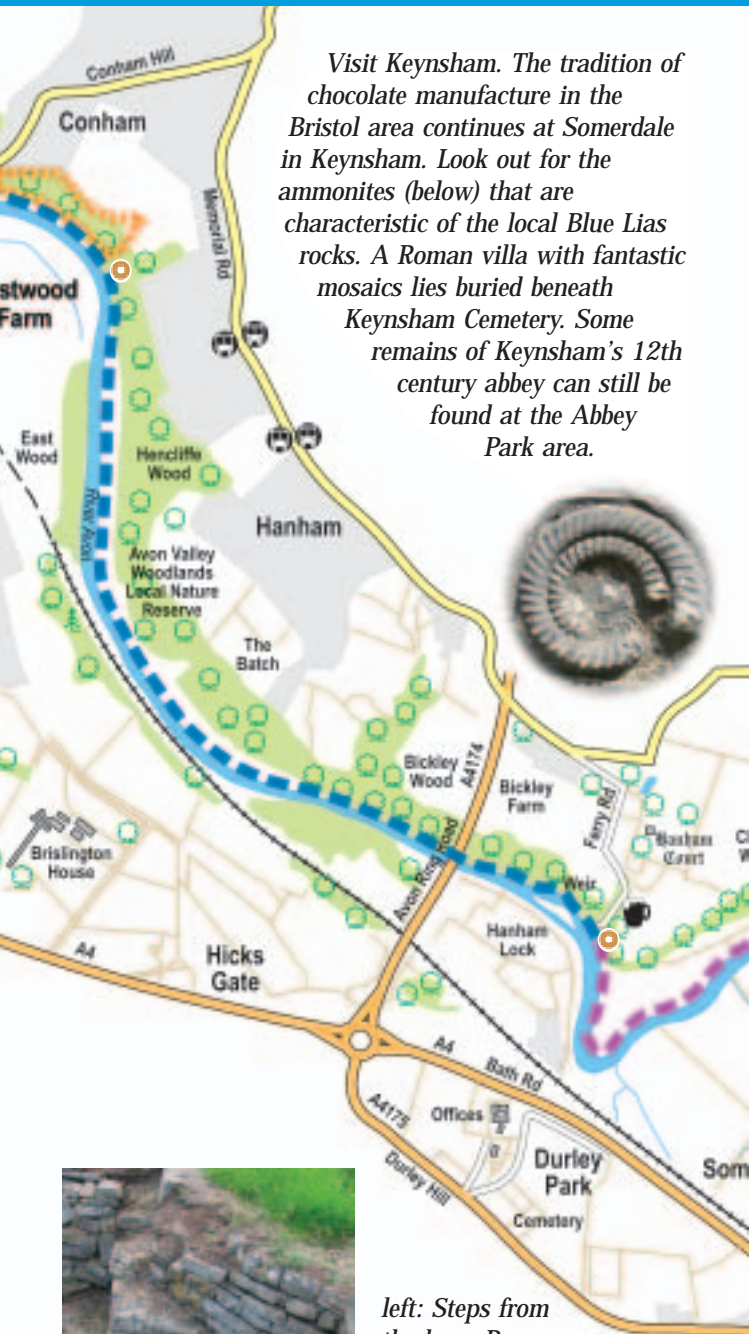
Loop Walk 3 *Panorama Walk (1.5 miles / 2 km)*

Climb the 'hundred steps' to be rewarded with spectacular views of the River Avon and its steep wooded valley. This short circular walk passes through the Avon Valley Woodlands Local Nature Reserve, which includes sites of important industrial archaeology, reminding us of the rich natural resources that once laid beneath our feet and made this a busy place.

Cyclists will need to take a short diversion at the east end of St Philips Causeway. Cross St Philips Causeway, pass the KFC fast food outlet and ride along the cycle track to Feeder Road which will lead back to the Trail at Netham Park.



Visit Keynsham. The tradition of chocolate manufacture in the Bristol area continues at Somerdale in Keynsham. Look out for the ammonites (below) that are characteristic of the local Blue Lias rocks. A Roman villa with fantastic mosaics lies buried beneath Keynsham Cemetery. Some remains of Keynsham's 12th century abbey can still be found at the Abbey Park area.



left: Steps from the large Roman Villa at Keynsham. They have been covered by works in Keynsham Cemetery.



Route Information: This section is all off-road, on stone paths or field footpaths at least 1 metre wide except where tidal floods are eroding sections of the river bank one mile west of Hanham.

Cyclists and horse riders in particular, should be aware of these sections. The path here can be wet and muddy in bad weather. Cyclists wishing to continue from Hanham to Bath should take a



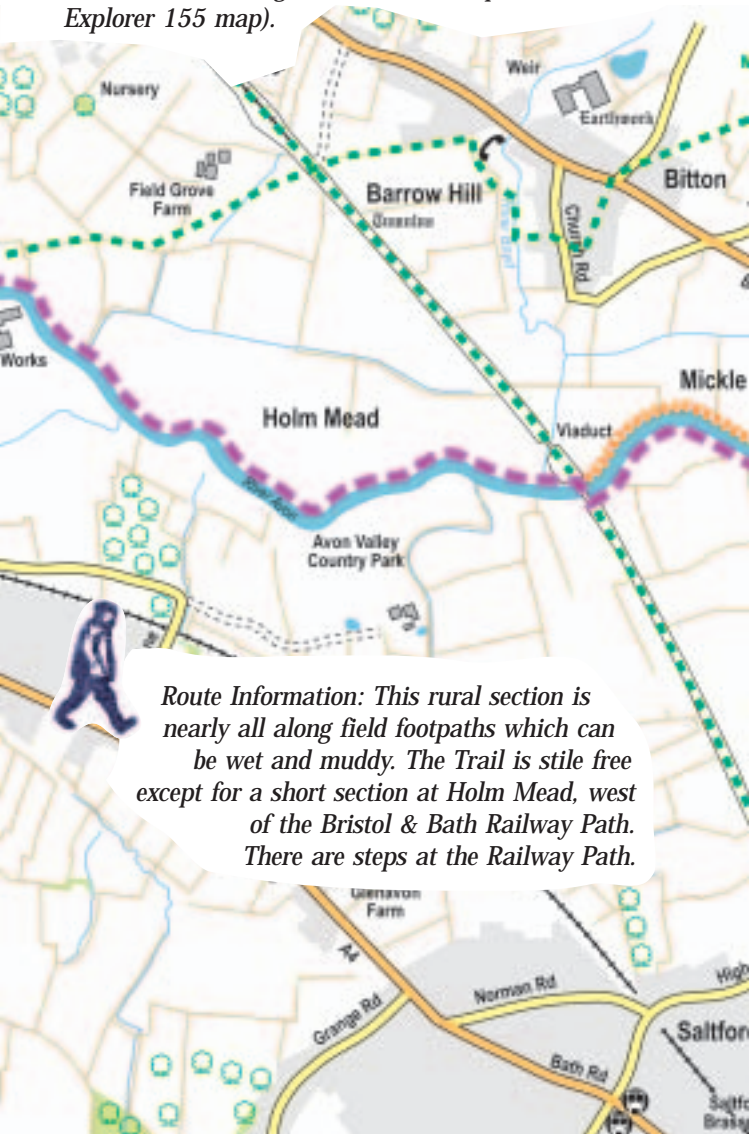
short detour up the lane from the Chequers Inn car park. A right turn at the junction leads on to the A431 to Bitton. Follow signs to Bitton until you pick up the Bristol & Bath Railway Path at Bitton Station, which then provides wonderful views of the surrounding countryside before rejoining the River Avon Trail west of Bath.



Loop Walk 4 *North Stoke Circular (4 miles / 6km)*

A detour to Swineford along the north side of the River Avon will lead you to a scenic climb up to the pretty village of North Stoke. This walk passes along a lovely old byway with beautiful views across Pipley Bottom and offers a spectacular panorama of the Avon Valley from the little church at the top of the village.

A short walk further leads you to Little Down Hill Fort – one of a series along the Cotswold scarp (see OS Explorer 155 map).



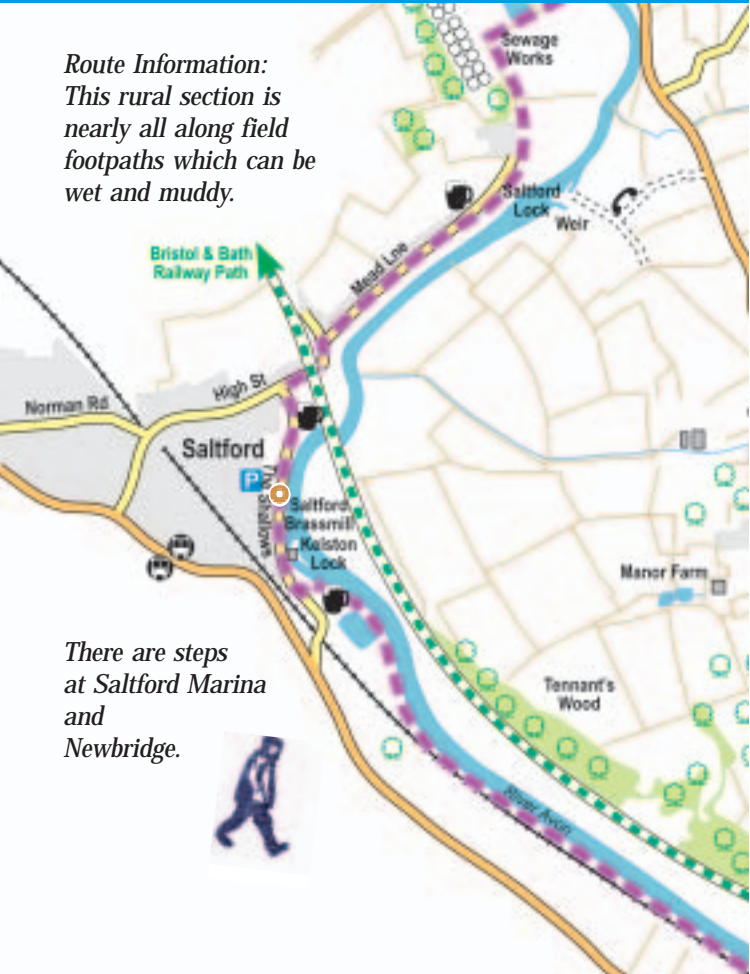
Route Information: This rural section is nearly all along field footpaths which can be wet and muddy. The Trail is stile free except for a short section at Holm Mead, west of the Bristol & Bath Railway Path. There are steps at the Railway Path.



above: After the climb – the church at North Stoke, with fine views across the Avon Valley.



*Route Information:
This rural section is
nearly all along field
footpaths which can be
wet and muddy.*



*There are steps
at Saltford Marina
and
Newbridge.*



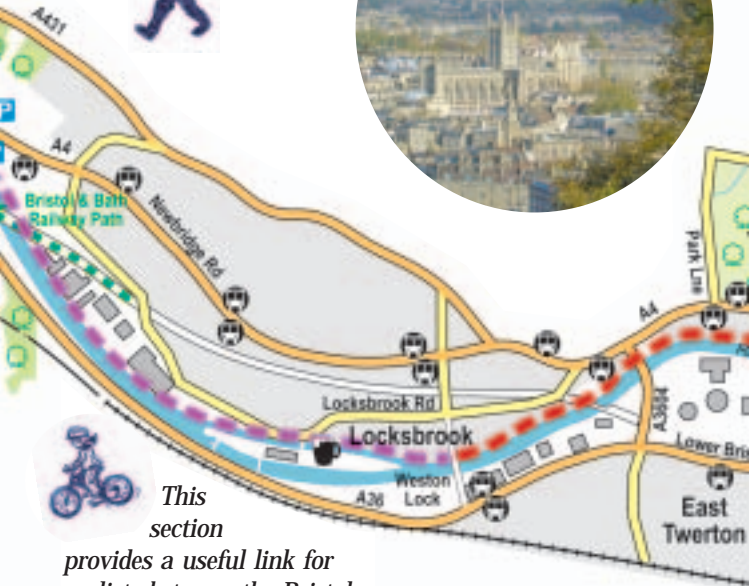
*left: One of over
30 mills that were
once powered by the
Avon. Saltford Brass
Mill is one of the most
important surviving
remains of the brass
industry in England.
Tel: 0117 986 2216
for opening times or
visit:
www.brassmill.com*

below: Looking downstream from Salford, the edge of the Cotswolds rise above the river. To the right you can see two towers – all that remain of Kelston Brass Mill's furnaces.



Route Information: A 3 mile section of generally good level surfaces of stone or tarmac at least 1 metre wide leading right into the centre of Bath.

Steps at Churchill Bridge and Pulteney Bridge.



This section

provides a useful link for cyclists between the Bristol & Bath Railway Path and the Kennet & Avon Canal Towpath which continues into Wiltshire along a peaceful, off-road route with waterside views.

right: Widcombe Lock marks the junction between the River Avon and the Kennet & Avon Canal. From 1810, when it opened, until the arrival of the railway, this was the main trade link between Bristol and London.



Loop Walk 5 *Beechen Cliff (1.5 miles / 2 kms)*

Take a walk up the steep slopes of Beechen Cliff – “that noble hill whose beautiful verdure and hanging coppice render it so striking an object from almost every opening in Bath.” (Jane Austen, *Northanger Abbey*). Don't miss the views over the city and the beautiful mature beech trees.

left: Bath Abbey from Beechen Cliff.



Working with Schools and the Community

Local Knowledge

This project – the creation of 15 interpretation boards, a guide book and a website to promote the River Avon Trail – also acted to forge local links with the communities who live and work along the river.



In early 2004, a number of local meetings were held to explain the project. Great enthusiasm and generosity were encountered. The project also published a bi-monthly news bulletin.



The project consulted with local history and conservation societies to arrange and advertise local discovery walks, hosted and led by people from those groups.

Working with Schools

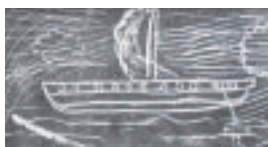
In the summer 2004, school projects were also arranged. These used local knowledge as a basis for cross-curricular workshops.



left: The National Trust and the Avon Gorge and Downs Wildlife Project set up activities involving over

70 local schoolchildren to explore and celebrate the natural history of the Avon Gorge. With the help of the Avon Wildlife Trust, the children created artwork which formed an enormous banner displayed on the large graffiti-covered rock above the River Avon Trail.

right: After collecting a number of local stories at Pill Regatta, J19, Pill's amateur drama group, visited Crockerne Pill Primary School where the stories were retold as drama and games. The children went on to create artwork from their experiences in a printing workshop. To see the book visit: www.riveravontrail.org.uk



below: At Saltford Brass Mill, children from Saltford Primary School worked with artists to interpret both the flowing river and its wildlife as willow sculpture. This was arranged as part of Doors Open Day at the Brass Mill. There were record numbers of visitors. All parties are looking forward to repeating the experience next year.

below: Children at Barton Hill Nursery & Infant School worked with an animator. The theme of the animation was the river and the transformation of the area. This project was organised as a collaboration with Community at Heart and Barton Hill Local History Group. See the animation on the website or at: www.electricdecember.org.uk



Who Manages the Trail?

Avon Valley Partnership

This booklet was published by the Avon Valley Partnership with funding from the Heritage Lottery Fund. The Partnership comprises local authorities and environmental organisations with an interest in improving the environment and enjoyment of the Avon Valley. For information and queries regarding the River Avon Trail please contact the Avon Valley Development Officer: 0117 922 4325.



Forest of Avon

The Forest of Avon partnership connects people to trees, timber and woodlands by enhancing natural environments close to local communities. This includes several projects in the Avon Valley to improve recreational routes such as the River Avon Trail and the Community Forest Path, and to create new woodlands. One such woodland at Sydenham Mead, north of Keynsham, was recently planted with the help of local schoolchildren whilst the larger Manor Road Community Woodland, to the west of Saltford, is managed by Bath & North East Somerset Council and the local community. Contact the Forest of Avon: 0117 953 2141 or visit the website at www.forestofavon.org.uk for more details.



Picture Credits

All illustrations by Lindy Clark

All photographs by Liz Milner and Peter Milner, except for:

Cover: Pulteney Bridge - Miriam Woolnough (B&NES Council)

Page 6: Scurvy Grass - Pat O'Reilly; Autumn Squill - AGWP (Helen Hall)

Page 7: Samuel Jackson painting - Bristol Record Office;

Wreck of the Gypsy - John Rich Collection

Page 9: Troopers Hill - Friends of Troopers Hill;

Aerial view Wagon Works - Tozer Collection

Page 12: Romano-Celtic Head - photographer unknown;

Pulteney Bridge - Miriam Woolnough (B&NES Council)

Page 27: Saltford Brass Mill - Friends of Saltford Brass Mill

written, researched and designed by C&M Associates:

Ruth Coleman & Peter Milner

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The National Trust

The National Trust protects places of historic interest or natural beauty for everyone to enjoy forever. It owns and manages Leigh Woods with the Forestry Commission. There are many trails you can explore in this lovely National Nature Reserve by foot or by bike. For more information and a free leaflet about Leigh Woods contact: 0117 973 1645.

The Avon Gorge & Downs Wildlife Project



This project is working to secure the outstanding wildlife interest of the Bristol side of the Avon Gorge and the Clifton and Durdham Downs and to raise awareness and understanding of this unique location and its importance for people and wildlife. Contact 0117 903 0609 – or for more information, visit: www.bristolzoo.org.uk/conservation/avonpage



North Somerset Council

North Somerset Council owns Lower Rownham Hill and manages the site with the help of the National Trust and Treadm. This pleasant site next to the River Avon Trail offers great views over the River Avon and Hotwells and a new path runs through the site linking the River to the Clifton Suspension Bridge.

If you encounter any obstacles along the River Avon Trail please report them to:
Tel: 0117 922 4325.

