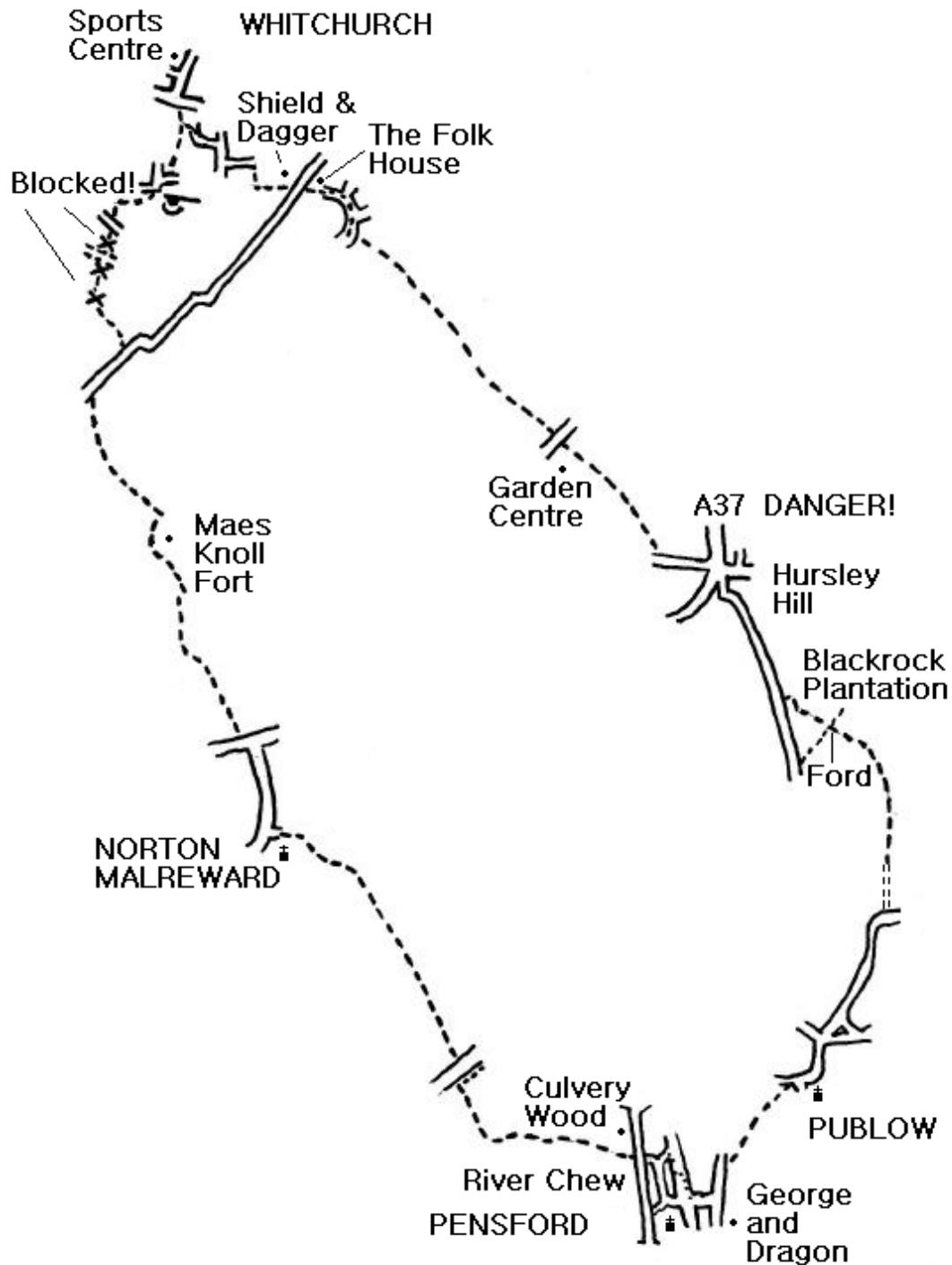


MAES KNOLL OR 'THE CATERPILLAR'

10K



The purpose of this route is to provide a link between the Forest Path and the suburb of Whitchurch, as opposed to the village around the church on the A37. The original intention was to begin at the Sports Centre at Whitchurch but this proved impossible for two reasons. In the first place, the Sports Centre was closed for

refurbishment, a temporary setback that would be rectified by the passage of time. More seriously, the footpath from the sports Centre to Maes Knoll had been blocked by barbed wire. The housing estate had clearly been laid out with the intention of linking the Sports Centre with the path up the hill. It is possible to get to the edge of the farmland on grass nearly all the way. But the first stile is obstructed by two strands of barbed wire and there are no further stiles on the path. Apparently a local farmer is exploiting a loophole in the law, which cut a short section of the path when the estate was first laid out.

Apparently, the farmer has had trouble with people walking their dogs across his fields. I would have thought that the best cure for that ill would be clearly signed and maintained footpaths; but there you go!

So the route description starts at the shops beside the Whitchurch Folk House opposite the Shield and Dagger instead.

This route explores the threatened landscape on the eastern end of the Dundry Slopes. This spectacular countryside is under attack from the long term plan to extend the ring road through Hartcliffe to connect with the A38 in order to improve access to Bristol Airport.

It also explores the broken ground between the A37 and the parish of Publow with its steep slopes and little woods enlivened with evocative names like Black Rock and Priest Down. The enclosed nature of some sections of the path between Publow and Whitchurch mean that it is liable to be overcome by nettles and brambles during the summer, so this works best as a winter route, provided that you are equipped with suitable foot ware. The road crossing at the top of Hursley Hill is dangerous, and not suitable for those who are hard of hearing on their own.

Refreshments are available at the Shield and Dagger in Whitchurch and at the Rising Sun and the George and Dragon in Pensford.

If you are travelling by car, you can park at the Shield and Dragon with the landlord's permission or at the Village Hall in Pensford.

Buses no. 20, 21, 50 and 51 all stop near East Dundry Lane. The 50 and 51 actually cross it.

FROM WHITCHURCH TO PENSFORD

Head up East Dundry Lane past some shops and houses into the countryside.

Keep going up the hill, which winds sharply right and left and then passes the kissing gate at the top of the blocked path from Whitchurch on the right.

As the climb begins to level out, look for a stile on the left.

In the field, follow the contour, keeping a fence on your right.

Go through the kissing gate at the top of escarpment and turn left, keeping a fence on your left.

When you reach it, climb the embankment of Maes Knoll and follow it round to the right.

This embankment is so huge that I find it hard to believe that it is merely one side of the encampment and not the burial mound of a slain host.

There are tremendous views across the valley from the highest point of Maes Knoll and you should be able to make out Stantonbury Hill on the other side of the Chew, which is connected to Maes Knoll by the West Wansdyke.

It was from here, according to folklore, that the giant Hakewell or Hauteville threw boulders into the valley to form the standing stones at Stanton Drew below. Similar stories are told of the giants Vincent and Gorram to explain the geography of the Avon Gorge and the islands of the Severn.

At the end of the embankment, descend and follow the escarpment edge to the left, where there another stile has been replaced by a kissing gate.

Through the gate, follow the wood on your right to a farm track descending to the right.

Follow the track to a kissing gate.

Follow the distinct path to another kissing gate below a seat.

Descend the next field keeping the hedge on your right until you reach a kissing gate onto the road at Norton Malreward.

According to legend, this village received its name because the giant was dissatisfied with the reward given him by the king for his feat of strength.

On the road, do a left-right into the village.

Take the second track on the left indicated by a bridle path sign.

Turn left along the drive past Manor Farm. Follow the signs, which take you between a house and a barn containing a hay wain into a field.

In the field, bear left to the track up the hill, over a grass landing strip. The landing strip is a potential hazard as I have often seen a plane at the far end ready to take off.

The track continues straight on across the open field to a steeply descending stony track. This track leads onto the B3130, which is probably a greater hazard than the landing strip.

Turn left to find a kissing gate into the field opposite.

In the field, turn right (back the way you have just come) to find a stile next to a gate.

Over this stile, turn left and follow the fence down hill and through a kissing gate.

In the next field, bear left to find a pair of small metal gates and a bridge next to the river.

Follow the river downstream through two more kissing gates, the second of which takes you into the conservation woodland, called **Culvery Wood**, which is looked after by the Woodland Trust..

Keep going up the track to the right, through another kissing gate under the viaduct and down the track which turns into a tarmac road to emerge next to **The Rising Sun in Pensford**.

Turn left up to the main road and then right to the pedestrian crossing.

Over the crossing turn right and then take the first left to the village lockup below **the George and Dragon**.

FROM PENSFORD TO WHITCHURCH

From the lock-up, turn left and look for the kissing gate into the field on your right. (It is behind a white rail.)

In the field, turn left alongside the hedge until you reach the gate near the village hall car park and bear right down the hill.

Head toward Publow church to a kissing gate beside a gap and then on to a kissing gate in the diagonally opposite corner near the church.

Cross the bridge over the River Chew and follow the road past the church.

As the road bends to the right take the second turning on your left (sign-posted to Keynsham), which leads up the hill known as Priest Down.

Continue up the road past Priest Down Farm and a house called Mendip View, then, after the road bends to the right, look for a gate on your left next to a footpath sign.

Climb the gate into an enclosed track and follow it past a stile and a small tip.

Past the tip, which contained street furniture and wooden pallets when we went past, follow the track past a gate on the left.

Turn right through a gate into the field and then left past a new building that might become a stable.

Look for a stile in the hedge ahead.

Over the stile, bear right to a gate.

Through the gate, turn left down the hill to a stile beside a gate. There was a dead squirrel displayed on the gate post when we got there.

Ford the stream and look for a stile on the right.

Over the stile, turn left and follow the hedge alongside the stream to a bridge onto a lane.

(If you have an OS map with you, you may prefer to follow the path straight ahead through the new plantation. There is a stile into a horse field on the right at the other end of the path. Over this stile, you should bear left to a stile next to some stables and another stile onto the lane. However, when we went there, this route was obstructed by electric horse fencing.)

In either case, turn right on the lane and continue up the hill to a T-junction at the top.

Turn left to the A37 at the top of Hursley Hill.

Cross over the road to a lane on the far side behind some wooden posts. This is a hazardous road crossing and you will need to take great care, listening out for traffic coming up the hill around the bend.

In the lane, turn left and follow it for about a hundred and eighty metres until you reach a kissing gate up some steps, just before a house called Melbourne on the right and another called Southview on the left.

The path alongside the hedge on the left is now blocked, so you will need to walk past some stables to a kissing gate behind a dung heap.

Continue to follow the left hand hedge through a series of kissing gates, some of which are hidden by vegetation and look as if they may be overwhelmed by nettles

and brambles in the summer, especially one section through a piece of scrub. Another stile into an enclosed path was obscured by a fallen elm sapling. The last section, alongside White Hall Garden Centre, looked as if nettles might be a particular problem in the summer. There is a kissing gate and a bridge into the garden centre car park and another kissing gate hidden in the right hand corner out of it.

Cross Norton Lane to a new kissing gate and then follow the right hand hedge to the end of a long field.

At the far end, you should be able to identify the remains of a disused railway line. There are two kissing gates, the first of which seems to be without function and some steps leading into a field.

In the field, follow the right hand hedge to another kissing gate straight ahead.

Next follow the left hand hedge to a post bearing a ramblers' sign and another kissing gate into a path through some houses into a cul-de-sac called Emmett Wood.

At the end of the close, turn right into another road and follow it round a bend to a bus stop on the left.

Go straight ahead into Half Acre Close and follow the path at the end past a security fence into East Dundry Lane. The Folk House is on your right and the Shield and Dagger is straight ahead.