

Crossgate Community Partnership

The Neville's' Cross Battle Walk

Remit

Concern was expressed at the CCP meeting on 1 March at the state of the Neville's Cross Battle Walk, which is a signposted route. Ann Evans and Roger Cornwell agreed to investigate and report back.

We walked the route (see map at end) as if we were visitors to Durham relying on the signage. We also used the leaflet about the walk which had been prepared by the former City Council. Ann Evans and Roger Cornwell walked the section along and to the east of the A167 and Roger Cornwell and Jean Rogers covered the stretch west of the A167.

Summary

The Neville's Cross Battle Walk was inaugurated in October 1996 as part of the 650th anniversary commemoration of the battle. The newly-waymarked route followed existing paths and roads. An accompanying leaflet was published.

The paths we used were in excellent condition and we encountered absolutely no problems underfoot. In particular the path between Laburnum Avenue and Farnley Mount, which has been problematical in the past, looked as if it had received recent attention and now has a good flight of steps which have been cleared of fallen leaves and washed-down soil. The paths through Flass Vale have also been recently upgraded, presumably by the Friends of Flass Vale.

The route is waymarked with yellow discs (see picture, approximately half-size). However, at a number of key points these are missing and the visitor unfamiliar with Durham or the route could have problems.

There is too much litter and rubbish and this detracts from the enjoyment of the walk. The low points are the railway embankment alongside Redhills Lane and the footpath skirting the Johnston School.



The two information boards on the footbridges over the A167 are good and informative but the more northerly was dirty and was revisited and cleaned (see appendix for photos). We thought that there was potential for a third board near Maidens Bower and maybe elsewhere on the walk.

We recommend that CCP approach the Durham County Council Parish Paths Partnership (known as P3 for short) for help with waymarking, information boards, and possibly a leaflet reprint. They can provide practical advice and funding at the 50% or 100% depending on the item. We also recommend that the Neighbourhood Warden, Durham Johnston school, and Network Rail be approached regarding the litter.

Footpaths

The paths we walked were Durham City 9, 13, 14, 8 and 108. All were in excellent condition except for footpath 9 alongside the River Browney where some holes had appeared alongside the edging boards beside the river. As mentioned above footpath 13 where it descends from Farnley Mount to Laburnum Avenue can be tricky, but when we walked it it was in excellent condition with a good flight of steps which have been cleared of fallen leaves and washed-down soil.

Where paths leave roads they are supposed to be signposted, and all of these were, with the exception of footpath 13 westbound from the head of St Johns Road. This omission is unlikely to cause any practical difficulty.

There is a footpath leading from the top of Flass Street (by the entrance to Redhills) down to the end of Ainsley Street. This is not part of the walk and is in poor repair. It passes the remains of Flass Well. This is not on the definitive map but is clearly a right of way.

Waymarking

A visitor without a map and unfamiliar with the route would not be able to follow it as essential waymarks are missing. No doubt these have disappeared since the route was laid out in 1996. This is our main finding and we recommend that P3 be approached to help with their replacement. The problem points are listed below, with the key ones, when the route could go more than one way, in bold. The route is only signposted anti-clockwise from the footbridge over the A167 near the junction with Toll House Road. Consideration might be given to waymarking it both ways.

Junction of Newcastle Road/Toll House Road: no indication at all that you need to go down Toll House Road. A finger post might help here as there are a lot of other signs.

Red Hills Lane: on emerging from the railway underpass, to go downhill.

Outside entrance to Redhills Miners' Hall at junction of Red Hills Lane and Flass Street.

Waddington Street / Flass Street junction near bus garage. This is important as there is another public footpath signposted (number 120) which is not the correct way.

Other end of Ainsley Street pointing towards Flass Vale has been waymarked but one is vandalised and might be replaced.

The walk along footpath 8 through Flass Vale is quite long and, with the concurrence of the Friends of Flass Vale, some extra waymarks might help.

Top of Flass Vale: this is where the path doubles back to climb out westward. There is a railway sleeper here serving as a robust post from which it looks as if the waymarks have been removed.

Northern footbridge over A167 Newcastle Road: Waymark needed on eastern side.

Litter

The route is disfigured in places by litter. The two worst examples are the railway embankment by Red Hills Lane and Flass Street, and just inside the fence surrounding the Durham Johnston School, pictured right. We recommend that Network Rail be asked to tidy up their land, as this is their responsibility, and that the school authorities be approached, possibly through intermediaries (we note that both of our County Councillors are governors).

We also noted two examples of rubbish overflowing from bins at what we took to be student households. One was the top house in Flass Street, the other the former Red Cross HQ at the entrance to Flass Vale.



Information Boards

There are two of these, one each on the two footbridges crossing the A167 Newcastle Road. They are good and informative, and well-placed as they encourage people to use the bridges rather than try to cross this busy road on the level. They also, literally, give an overview of the battlefield. The more northerly was dirty, so we returned and cleaned it up (see appendix at end for photos).

We thought that there was scope for further boards, in particular at Maiden's Bower in Flass Vale, where monks from Durham Cathedral were said to have brought the holy cloth of St Cuthbert. This would have to be with the agreement of the Friends of Flass Vale. Other sites might be at the Piggery in Flass Vale (though this has no connection with the battle).

Related to this, consideration should be given to updating and reprinting the information leaflet.

The Parish Paths Partnership

This scheme has been run by Durham County Council successfully for many years. It works primarily but not exclusively with parish councils, hence its name. But voluntary groups are assisted too and we think an approach to them could be beneficial. Grants are available, including 100% for signposting and waymarking, and 50% for displays, map boards, and leaflets. The other 50% might come from our own funds or from local councillors, if they were amenable, or of course both.

There is more information on the County Council web site at <http://www.durham.gov.uk/Pages/Service.aspx?ServiceId=6117>

Roger Cornwell and Ann Evans
March 2011

Appendix

The information board on the northern bridge was dirty (it appeared to be green algae) but it scrubbed up nicely! See these photographs:



Before



After

