

# Heritage Walks

## POINTS OF INTEREST

### General

**Willsbridge Mill is Avon Wildlife Trust's environmental education centre. Located in Willsbridge Valley Local Nature Reserve, an oasis of wildlife on the edge of the city, it has a fascinating industrial past.**

Built in the 1830s from Pennant Sandstone quarried in the Valley, Willsbridge Mill was a working corn mill until 1968. In July of that year, during heavy thunderstorms the rising floodwaters of Siston Brook, along with a fallen tree breached the dam wall and caused major flooding in the buildings. Business ceased due to the resulting irreparable damage. After laying derelict for the next 10 years Avon Wildlife Trust undertook a dramatic restoration project of both the Mill and adjacent long barn and in 1986 the regions first environmental education centre opened.

There are a series of attractive walks exploring the heritage, wildlife and geology of the Valley. Each year the Trust offers a comprehensive education programme for visiting schools and a series of public events and community festivals including Apple Day, Tree Dressing and Wassailing celebrations. The Mill also runs a community-volunteering project with volunteers assisting in all aspects of the running of the centre and nature reserve.



### Further information

#### Wild Roots

Wild Roots is an innovative Heritage Lottery Funded, three year project that is working with local communities to conserve, enhance and celebrate the natural and cultural heritage of South Gloucestershire.

www.southglos.gov.uk/wildroots

Telephone: 01454 863581

#### Walking to Health

Walking to Health in South Gloucestershire aims to get residents more physically active by participating in regular health walks in their local areas. The project works with a team of volunteers and other projects such as Active South Gloucestershire and Exercise on Prescription.

www.southglos.gov.uk/walkingtohealth

Telephone: 01454 868006

#### Avon Wildlife Trust - Willsbridge Mill

Willsbridge Mill is the Trust's main education and visitor centre. It provides practical environmental education for all ages and training for teachers. Special events open to the public are held at Willsbridge throughout the year and there are plenty of opportunities for volunteers to get involved in a range of activities.

Telephone: 0117 932 6885 for details

#### Acknowledgements

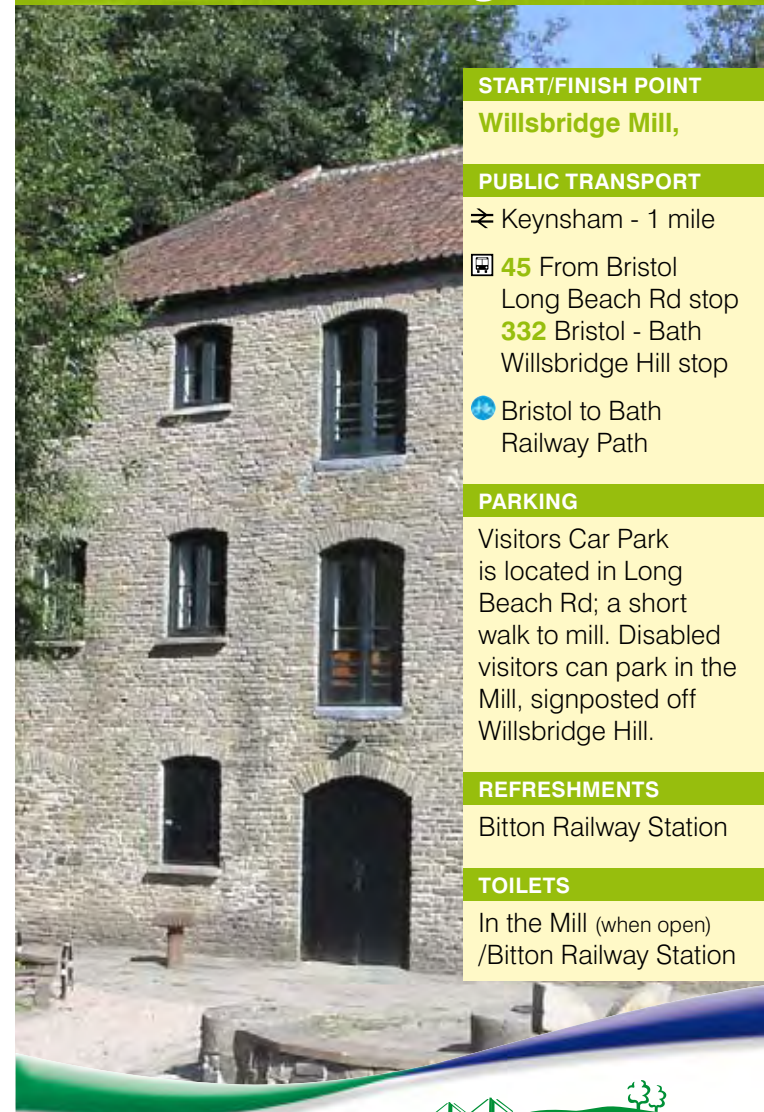
Ruth Worsey at Willsbridge Mill. David Cole, Development Co-ordinator for Bitton Station.

This information can be made available in other languages, in large print, Braille or on audio tape. Please phone 01454 868004 if you need any of these or any other help to access Council services.



WALKING TO HEALTH

# Willsbridge Valley Heritage Walks



#### START/FINISH POINT

Willsbridge Mill,

#### PUBLIC TRANSPORT

Keynsham - 1 mile

45 From Bristol Long Beach Rd stop  
332 Bristol - Bath Willsbridge Hill stop

Bristol to Bath Railway Path

#### PARKING

Visitors Car Park is located in Long Beach Rd; a short walk to mill. Disabled visitors can park in the Mill, signposted off Willsbridge Hill.

#### REFRESHMENTS

Bitton Railway Station

#### TOILETS

In the Mill (when open) /Bitton Railway Station



Design + Print Services • Printed on recycled paper • CE&CR 4661 • www.southglos.gov.uk (access is free from your local library)



WALKING TO HEALTH

# Willsbridge Valley Heritage Walks

## Sites en route

<b>A</b>	<b>Mill</b>	Built in the 1830s from locally quarried Pennant Sandstone, Willsbridge Mill was a working corn mill until 1968. In July of that year, disastrous rainfall caused the Mill dam to collapse under pressure from a fallen tree in the rising floodwaters of the mill pond. This resulted in irreparable damage to the buildings.
<b>B</b>	<b>Quarry Face</b>	Now designated sites of regional geological importance, the Pennant Sandstone quarries were not only used for building the mill but also supplying material for the magnificent Gloucestershire stone stile located at the field in Small Cliff Meadow behind the mill. Other sandstone examples are California Incline Bridge, drystone walls around the site and some of the gravestones in nearby St Anne's Church.
<b>C</b>	<b>Bristol to Bath Railway path</b>	The Avon Valley Railway is based on part of the former Midland Railway branch line which ran from Mangotsfield to Bath. Opened in 1869, it offered an alternative to the Great Western route to and from the Georgian city. Six daily trains ran between the cities of Bristol and Bath and in 1910 a Manchester - Bournemouth Express service also used the line. During the 1930s the line was upgraded to take larger locomotives and both passenger and freight traffic flourished. With cheaper road transport available in the 1950s the line's demise began. Passenger traffic stopped in 1966, whilst freight trains kept the line open until 1971. During summer 1972 the track was removed.
<b>D</b>	<b>Bitton Railway Station</b>	A group of local railway enthusiasts set about returning steam to the Avon Valley. The hard work of renovating derelict station buildings, relaying track and restoring locomotives began in earnest and by 1974 the first steam trains were running again, albeit on a few yards of track. Now some 35 years later the railway is one of the major tourist attractions in the area and the main stopping off point for the many walkers and cyclists who use the Bristol and Bath Railway Path each year.
<b>E</b>	<b>Rocks &amp; Rail Geology site</b>	Rocks exposed during 19th century excavation of the railway are Triassic and Jurassic in age. This red deltaic sandstone was laid down in warm, sub-tropical, shallow seas approximately 300 million years ago. Ammonite (extinct group of marine animals) fossils discovered here are some of the earliest examples ever exposed in Britain.
<b>F</b>	<b>The Dramway</b>	The historic coal-carrying railway runs along the eastern edge of Siston Brook. Half way along the Valley, California Incline Bridge was built to carry a branch line of the Dramway, to serve the nearby California Colliery that was situated on the other side of the stream.  The Dramway ceased operation in 1904 when the colliery became too uneconomic to mine following flooding of mineshafts. Notice Scots Pine trees in the field between the bridge and St Anne's Church, grown for use as pit props in the mines. Nearer the Mill, the Dramway disappears under the meadow in a 408-foot long tunnel to emerge just before the A431/A4175 roundabout. The landowner refused the building of the Dramway overland at this point because he deemed it to be an eyesore. During WW2, the tunnel was used as an air raid shelter, and more recently to farm mushrooms. Interestingly, it was the last horse-drawn railway to be built in the country; with 'railway mania' taking over, the Dramway was out of date before the makers had laid the last track!!!



Willsbridge Valley



Willsbridge Mill



Scene in front of Willsbridge Mill July 1968 after breaching of Dam wall



Willsbridge Mill







WALKING TO HEALTH

# Willsbridge Valley

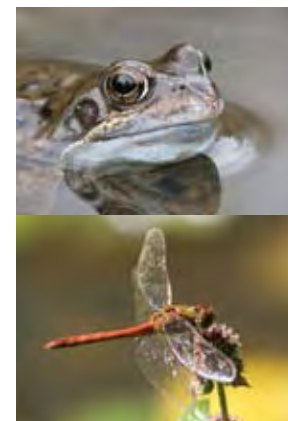
## Heritage Walks



**Longer Walk** ▶ 2.7 miles

**S**urrounded by housing estates, Willsbridge Mill is located within Willsbridge Valley Local Nature Reserve. This oasis for wildlife supports a mosaic of habitats, including ponds, woodland, quarries, meadow, and demonstration wildlife garden alongside the fast flowing Siston Brook, a tributary of the River Avon. This long route explores the fascinating heritage of Willsbridge Mill Local Nature Reserve (LNR), as well as Bitton Railway Station, part of the famous Avon Valley Railway. The path is fairly level with some steep sections. Can get muddy.

- 1 **Leaving the Mill (A)** behind you follow road to the right, walking up the incline to follow public footpath sign to the right. Continue on path as it crosses over the brook (Mill will appear on your right) passing through bicycle chicane.
- 2 At Y-turning, bear right following signs for quarry. Continue along this path (can be muddy) for a few metres, climbing the steps to the **quarry face (B)**.
- 3 At the end of path, go through gate and cross quiet lane. Enter 2nd gate directly opposite and follow path in same direction (Be careful, this path is dotted with tree roots and can get very muddy). Stay on this path as it winds along the brook to your right.
- 4 Exit the reserve via a farm gate and turn right, crossing over the wooden bridge that will lead you onto School Road.
- 5 Cross School Road and head up the hill for a few metres, turning right (before the arches) to follow signs for the Railway Path. Climb the steps and turn left onto the Railway path, turn left again to follow the path north. Walk along the **Bristol to Bath Railway path (C)** until a level crossing appears on your right. Follow this across the tracks and onto the other side of the railway path.
- 6 Once over the railway line, follow path as it veers left around the circumference of St Anne's Primary School and onto School Road. Turn left to meet the junction with Barry Road.
- 7 Turn right to walk down Barry Road, ignoring exits, until you reach the Tollhouse on your right. Turn right into Cherry Gardens Lane, and immediately (10 yards) take the path on your left following signs for Bitton Railway Station.
- 8 Continue on this path as it winds down through houses, crossing Verwood Drive and Pines Road, keeping on this path as it leads you up to **Bitton Railway Station (D)** (passing through park and play area).
- 9 Turn right to follow the Bristol to Bath Railway Path, signpost to Bristol. Take care as many cyclists use this stretch.



- 10 Look out for vintage diesels (including the new arrival, class 107 diesel multiple unit) and steam trains as you follow the railway line. Continue on the path over the level crossing; take care watching out for trains passing.
- 11 Staying on the Railway path, look out for the geology site known as **Rocks & Rails (E)** on your left hand side. Carry on this path for a few hundred yards, until you reach the exit signposted Dramway Footpath.
- 12 Turning left, follow this path, using the steps on your right descend onto School Rd. Re-trace your steps back over the wooden bridge and take the first left-hand exit through a gateway. Carry on this path until the exit gate.
- 13 Turn left and follow the lane as it descends, following the signs for the Dramway & Small Clift Meadow. This zigzag path will lead you over the brook where you will then be faced with a Y junction, take the right hand path and follow along Siston Brook (now on right).

- 14 Keep on this path walking on part of the **19th century Dramway (F)** and passing Small Clift Meadow on your left. Go through the gate at the end of this path, walking between the Barn and white painted cottage which leads you back to the Mill.

### Shorter Walk

▶ 1.25 miles

This shorter route explores the fascinating heritage of Willsbridge Mill Local Nature Reserve (LNR). Starting at the Mill and taking in Catscliffe Wood, the Quarry and The Dramway. The path is fairly level with some steep sections. Can get muddy.

- 1 Facing **Willsbridge Mill (A)**, take the path that bears right between the mill barn and white painted cottage.
- 2 Keep on path passing through gateway, following signs for "Dramway". Continue on this path as it leads you along Siston Brook, look out for the stretch of **Dramway (F)**, until you reach a junction of two paths.
- 3 Keep to the left path, which leads you across the Brook and up a slight hill. Take the first left hand exit through a gateway. Continue along this muddy path, passing the **Quarry Face (B)**, until you reach a downhill section where you can take either steps or a slope to level walkway alongside the Brook (on left).
- 4 At T-junction, take path to the left following signs for the mill. Keep on this path as it winds its way down to the Mill, walking through a bicycle chicane.

