

Walk Twenty-Nine: Willsbridge Mill

Last updated: July 2020

The wooded Willsbridge Valley is a pleasant green lung in the eastern fringe of the Bristol urban area. The valley is maintained as a nature reserve by the Avon Wildlife Trust while a non-profit local group, Willsbridge Mill Community Refresh, looks after the mill itself and the surrounding buildings.

The spine of this shorter urban walk is the Siston Brook, a brisk stream that flows down to the River Avon near Keynsham. We will follow the brook through and out of the nature reserve in the direction of Oldland Common, then back through the nature reserve to return to our starting point.

The short length of this walk and its heavily wooded environment makes it an ideal circuit for a cloudy day when a longer walk might not be so appealing, although of course it is lovely in sunny weather too.

Useful Information

Terrain: Undulating. Includes steps, which can be avoided, and narrow gates, which can't.

Ground: Largely unpaved, areas may be soft under foot at wet times of year.

Key Attractions: Willsbridge Valley nature reserve; Willsbridge Mill.

Refreshments: Café at Willsbridge Mill

Starting point: Willsbridge Mill car park, Long Beach Road, Longwell Green

Getting there: Long Beach Road is served by local buses that run from Bristol City Centre to Longwell Green via St. George and Hanham.

Approx. Time: 1 hour 30 minutes

Approx. Distance: 1.8 miles

The Route

Our walk starts at the Willsbridge Mill car park on Long Beach Road, among the fairly anonymous late 20th Century houses of Longwell Green.

Step out of the car park and head west to cross Long Beach Road at a traffic island (1).

From this point, a path winds down into the woods amidst loosely planted native trees.



At the entrance to the Willsbridge Valley

Follow the path down into the woodland.

The tarmac path quickly gives way to something less formal that descends, tunnel-like, straight down into the **Willsbridge Valley nature reserve**. There is evidence of quarrying to the left.



Descending into the woods

Before long you will reach the main path along the northwest side of the Siston Brook (2). Railings ahead of you shield the drop down towards the stream itself.

Turn right, following the railings.

The rough path follows the stream from an elevated position. As you approach Willsbridge Mill you will see an access point to the water from the far side, followed by the stone structure of the mill itself with its arched windows.



The Siston Brook at Willsbridge Mill

Follow the path until you emerge next to a house on the main driveway (3) leading down to Willsbridge Mill. Turn left and descend the hill.

The driveway will lead you down towards the mill itself. On the way you will pass a pretty wildlife garden. The verges of the driveway are also planted with wildflowers. On the left, **Willsbridge Mill** itself is an imposing structure in grey stone. Opposite, the outbuildings containing the café are of a more welcoming scale.



Willsbridge Mill

▲ *The café at Willsbridge Mill is the only refreshment stop on this walk. When open, it offers a range of food options.*

Look for a flight of steps leading up from the gap between the mill and the café. If you wish to avoid the steps, bear right before the café building and climb the footpath behind it to rejoin the walk at the exit from the upper mill pond (5).

The staircase will lead you up to the **upper mill pond (4)**. This tranquil spot offers pondside boardwalks that provide the ideal perch from which to hunt for aquatic life. It also provides access to the stream itself if you would like to take a closer look.



The upper mill pond at Willsbridge Mill

When you've finished admiring the pond, a gate to the right will take you out on the main path running along the southeast side of the Siston Brook (5).

Turn left up the hill, going through the gate or over the stone stile to continue your circuit of the nature reserve.



The gate and stile behind the upper mill pond

You will climb to a higher position than before, where the nature reserve borders farmland. Occasional views can be glimpsed down to the stream on the left.

Cresting the hill, you will begin to head down again. After a short while, the path jinks right to join the line of the old Dramway (6).

The Dramway is the remains of a nineteenth century coal tramway that is now honoured in the form of a nine mile walking route through South Gloucestershire. We will only be walking a short stretch of it here. Behind you, a palisade fence covers the entrance to an old railway cutting that is closed to the public.

Follow the Dramway path.

Elements of public art alongside the path reference its historic use.

After a short while you will pass a tall stone bridge across the Siston Brook (7). For all its impressive scale, it is a bit of a bridge to nowhere as of today. Built in the 19th Century, historic maps reveal that it once carried a branch of the Dramway to the nearby California Colliery.



The old bridge on the Dramway

Continue straight on past the bridge. Ahead, in the distance, the Dramway is interrupted by a blocked-up opening where part of the old railway cutting has been filled in. Look for a turning that allows you to bear right onto a parallel footpath (8).

The parallel footpath makes an easy climb up to a gate out onto the road that crosses the blocked-up opening.

Turn left onto Cherry Garden Lane (9).

This part of **Cherry Garden Lane** is closed to traffic. As there are also no houses in the very first section, this gives it an interesting semi-abandoned feel.

You will descend past a stone wall overlooking the Willsbridge Valley. St. Anne's Church can be seen on the far side of the valley.



View across the valley from Cherry Garden Lane

As you reach the bottom of the hill, you will pass a few houses whose sloping front gardens have some pretty planting.

You will reach a junction where a wooden footbridge crosses the Siston Brook to the left (10). The footbridge seems to have replaced an earlier road bridge.

Take a brief detour to the right along School Road.

You will soon reach the bottom of an arched viaduct. This is where the **Bristol and Bath Railway Path** and the **Avon Valley Steam Railway** pass through the area on their way from Oldland Common to Bitton. If you'd like to see the view from the top of the viaduct, you can access it via a flight of steps to the right.

Return to the bottom of Cherry Garden Lane next to the footbridge (10).

Approach the footbridge and, without crossing it, take the narrow streamside access immediately to the right of it.



The streamside footpath

You will find yourself on a secluded footpath that runs alongside the stream, which will allow you to briefly extend your experience of the Siston Brook before you return through the nature reserve.

After a short while you will climb up to emerge on Court Road.

Turn left onto Court Road and descend the hill, passing a row of old cottages. At the bottom of the hill, cross the tiny footbridge on the left (11).



View from the footbridge to California Road

Enjoy the view of the stream as you cross it. You will touch down on a quiet spur of **California Road** that carries very little traffic.

Turn left onto California Road. Follow it until you return to the wooden footbridge (10).

St. Anne's Church looms over this quiet corner of Longwell Green.

It's time to return to the Willsbridge Valley nature reserve as we make our way back to the starting point.

Either go through the gate on the right or cross the metal stile next to it to return to the main path along the northwest side of the Siston Brook.

The gravel path climbs to an elevated position, passing another old mill on the far side of the stream.

Before long you will re-enter the woods on more level ground.

Stay on the main path. When the path splits at the top of a steep staircase, bear right so that you stay on more level ground.

You will return to the large stone bridge that you saw earlier (7).

Go straight on so that you continue along the main path.

The pleasant elevated path passes through more of the woodland, splitting briefly so that you have a choice of steps or a more accessible route.



The path through the woods

Eventually you will return to the point at which you first entered the Willsbridge Valley (2).

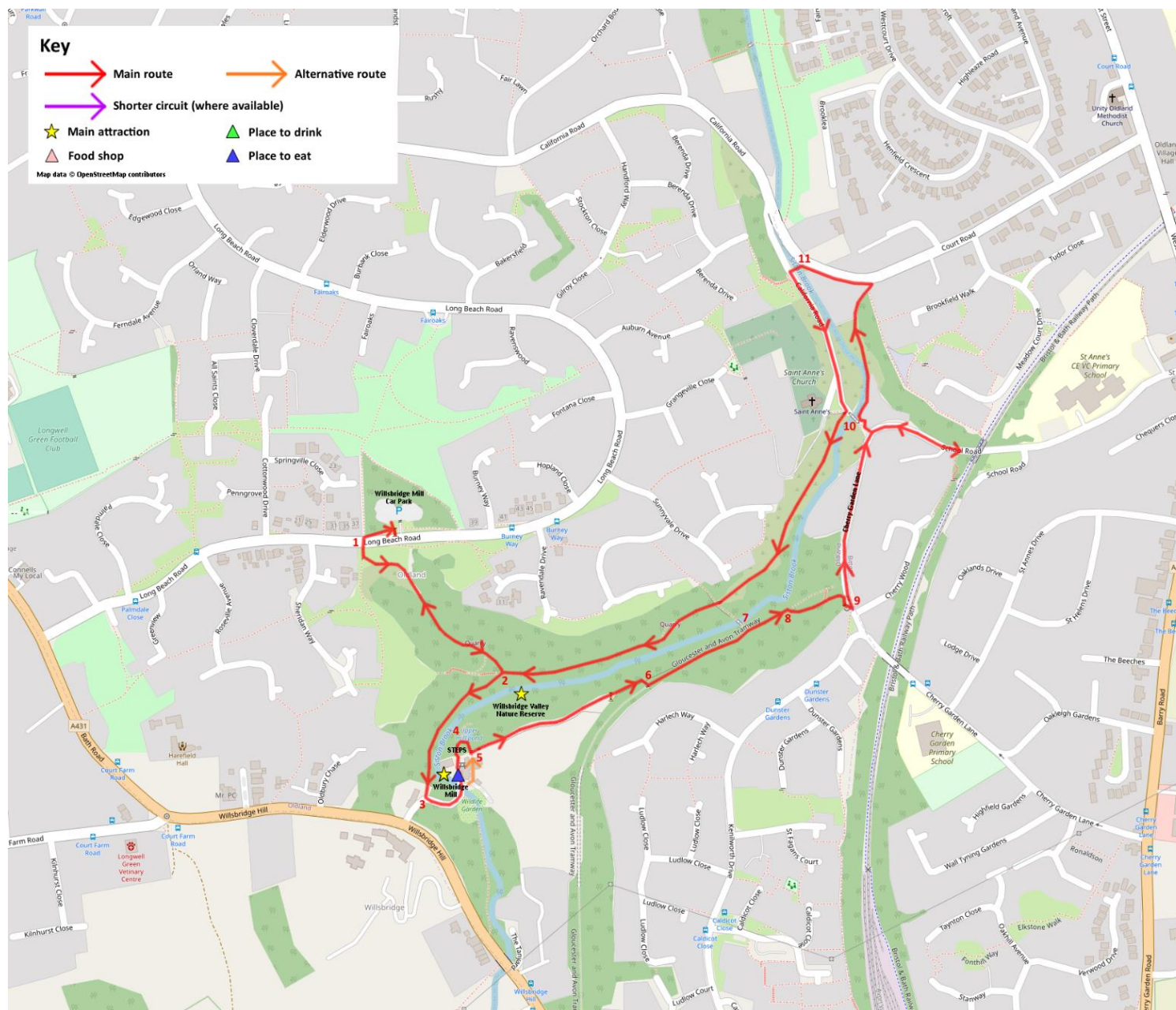
Turn right and retrace your steps up the hill to return to Long Beach Road. Cross at the traffic

island (1) to return to the car park and complete Walk Twenty-Nine.

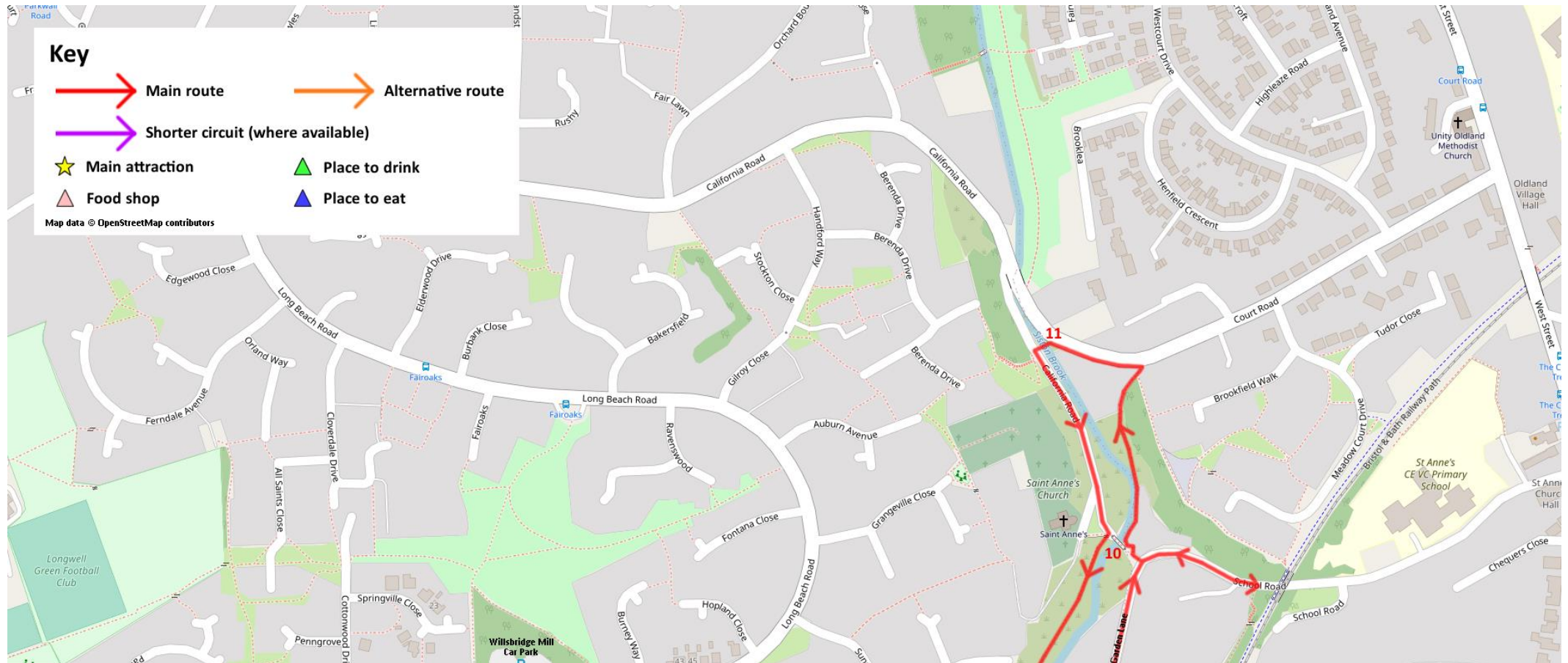
Coming Up

In Walk Thirty '*Siston Common*' we will head upstream to Siston Common, where the Warmley Brook (a tributary of the Siston Brook) threads its way through an area of common land. We will see how modern road building has carved the common up into parcels, each with its own character, and visit another section of the Bristol and Bath Railway Path.

Walk Twenty-Nine: Map



Mike's Bristol Walks
Walk Twenty-Nine: Willsbridge Mill



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