

Report on footpaths in Avebury parish

I have carried out a survey of all footpaths in the parish of Avebury between 9th May and 10th June 2015, and found them to be generally in good condition, with gates and stiles which do not need repair.

The exceptions to this rule are the Ridgeway, which has been deeply rutted by 4x4 users over the years, but is wide enough not to be a problem for walkers. AVEB14/10 (north from sarsens in Beckhampton Avenue), CHER18/10 (on the western boundary of the parish, beyond the clay pigeon shooting site) and AVEB3/10 (Green Street, near the Ridgeway) are also quite deeply rutted but passable. There are large puddles and deep, muddy ruts around Manor Farm in Green Lane, but again walkers can easily get round these (at the moment, at least!).

The route of two paths, AVEB4/10 (opposite Manor Farm) and AVEB18/10 (just past the clay pigeon shooting site) have been unilaterally moved by the landowners installing gates in the corner of the field rather on the route as shown by the definitive/OS maps, which leaves them open to challenge by Wiltshire Council (WC) and/or members of the public, but I do not believe it is worth trying to restore the original route as the revised ones are probably more usable.

I am aware that the lack of signage and changes to the route of AVEB15/10 (from the A4 to Calne to the east of the Grange) have already been reported to WC, and I understand that the landowner has applied (or will shortly do so) for a diversion of the path. A fingerpost and stile have recently been installed at the western end of this path on the A4 by WC, but unfortunately it is in the wrong place, very overgrown, and the stile step is covered in earth from an animal burrow. At the eastern end of the path, it has been diverted down the driveway of the Grange onto AVEB14/20, and the gate into the field at the end is padlocked.

I observed damage to “furniture” in only two places: the gate giving access to the western side of the churchyard is missing (this may well be deliberate?), and there is a missing latch on one of two gates where AVEB11/10 meets AVEB 7/10 (to the north of Silbury Hill).

However the biggest problem is with signage. S. 27(2) of the Countryside Act 1968 makes it mandatory for a Highway Authority (in this case, WC) to erect and maintain a signpost at every point where a right of way leaves a metalled road, unless after consultation with the parish council it is satisfied that it is not necessary. There are several places in the parish where there are no such signposts, but no evidence has been unearthed, either by WC or the parish council, that such consultations took place. There are other places where it would be desirable to erect signposts, and the existing ones are showing the effects of being exposed to the vagaries of the English weather for many years, and are in some cases illegible. Stephen Leonard of WC has advised that the WHS Management Plan requires all signs to be made of oak, at a cost of £350 each, but I have been unable to find any such reference in the plan. I strongly recommend the use of synthetic signs, which cost around £15, are much more durable than wooden ones and look just as good, to replace and add to the existing ones in the parish as part of the audit of signs to be done under the Plan.

Tim Lewis, 7th July 2015