



IG Liddell
Walk the Bristol Rail Round

The text in this document is merely an indication of what might be possible ... or what might have been possible at the time of researching (2024) or later revision. All walking routes are subject to change, but the pace of urban change is greater than in rural areas.

Each reader must assess whether each part of the route qualifies as suitable or safe for public access. The author does not warrant any point of legality or safety in any part of the description of the route.

Thanks are due to many people who have helped me with route-finding and with intelligence local to a number of areas traversed by the route. Their contributions enrich the route and the stories along it. Clearly, any mistakes and misinterpretations remain with the author.

© 2024 I G Liddell

Front cover photograph:
Clifton Suspension Bridge from the west

Walk the Bristol Rail Round

BSRR

Start	Bristol Temple Meads station — BS1 6QF
Finish	Bristol Temple Meads station — BS1 6QF
Distance	53.3km
Duration	11 hours 26 minutes
Ascent	523m

Start	Portway Park and Ride station — BS11 9QF
Finish	Poole's Wharf — BS8 4RU
Distance	10.3km
Duration	2 hours 08 minute
Ascent	53m



*The Prince of Wales Bridge
from Severn Beach*

Introduction

I was looking round for an exploration of new territory, and realised that I had never really seen Bristol. A few meetings and a couple of crossings between rail and bus stations, and that was it. Looking at the map, it seemed that I could follow a route, mainly off-street, from Temple Meads to Bristol Parkway station, and that would be a good morning's walk if I started out from London early, and I could be back home by mid-afternoon.

The reality was better than I expected, so I went back to the map. A similar morning could be had, starting at Parkway and ending at Severn Beach, at the end of the branch line. A shorter day would take me to Portway Park and Ride station, then return to Temple Meads by crossing the Avonmouth Bridge (the M5), following to old towpath, and climbing through Leigh Woods to cross Brunel's Clifton Suspension Bridge, and finishing along the harbourside after a precipitous descent from Clifton.

I realised that, for anyone with acrophobia, the bridges (particularly the M5 bridge, whose railings look decidedly flimsier than they actually are) would present some difficulty, so I walked an alternative route from Portway Park and Ride to Poole's Wharf with a riverside route via Sea Mills. This alternative is, it must be said, not as spectacular as the main route via Leigh Woods, but the route as far as Sea Mills is of good quality, though less than 2km beyond the station there, the route (following the Severn Way's Bristol Link) is forced onto the A4 as far as the entrance to the Floating Harbour

*The M5 Avonmouth Bridge
from Lamplighter's Marsh*



The five sections, then, are as follows.

- Bristol Temple Meads to Bristol Parkway
12.0km — *see* page 6
- Bristol Parkway to Severn Beach
15.7km — *see* page 13
- Severn Beach to Portway
9.2km — *see* page 19
- Portway to Bristol Temple Meads via Leigh Woods
16.3km — *see* page 23
- Portway to Poole's Wharf via Sea Mills
10.3km — *see* page 34

Getting to Temple Meads and Parkway for a good start to the day's walk (before 0930 in each case) was fairly easy — leave at 0600 for two local buses and a train to Reading — but in order to get onto the route before mid-morning at Severn Beach and at Portway, I had to walk 2km for my first leg of the journey, leaving home at 0520, except on a Saturday, when I had to leave at 0450 to catch a bus.

On that Saturday, I checked the rail route while waiting for the bus and discovered that the first two trains I was planning to use had been cancelled, so I ended up on the same Severn Beach service as before, having gained no benefit from the early start.

It was a surprise to find that I passed no shops between Temple Meads and Parkway, and only one on the next leg to Severn Beach. I passed a convenience shop in Pill and a coffee van in Leigh Woods. Clifton is, of course, replete with shops, cafés and pubs, and there are other such establishments along the harbourside. On the route via Sea Mills, there is nothing until you reach the harbour. This means that you have to carry all you need for the day.

Caution

To repeat, do not overestimate your head for heights when contemplating the high bridge crossings, particularly the M5 Avonmouth Bridge.

There is an emergency telephone at each end of the M5 bridge, but that puts you straight through to the Samaritans. There is a good bus service between Bristol and Pill which gives you the opportunity to take the main route without the M5 bridge crossing.

The Clifton Bridge will present far fewer problems, since there is a mesh wall beyond head height, and because there will be many more people around. At the point where the route leaves Leigh Woods, you may descend to river level by a path which leaves the road by an adjacent gate. You may then pass beneath the bridge and continue to Ashton Avenue, crossing the river and the harbour to rejoin the route at Poole's Wharf.

Bristol Temple Meads to Bristol Parkway

12.0km; 189m ascent; 2hr 42min

*Below — station entrance,
Bristol Temple Meads*

*Bottom — Mayflower
steaming up to haul a
tourist heritage train*

Introduction



1 The first leg of the route begins with the Bristol to Bath Railway Path to Clay Bottom, and continues, with short streetside intermissions, through Eastville Park, the Frome Valley, and Stoke Park. After a few streets of modern housing in the north-eastern corner of Stoke Park, there is a delightful woodland section before the final few streets in Harry Stoke to reach Bristol Parkway.

Bristol Temple Meads station was built as the terminus of Isambard Kingdom Brunel's Great Western Railway line from London Paddington (190km away), and was opened in 1840. In order to accommodate more trains and to facilitate through-running services, the station was extended during the 1870s and again during the 1930s, by which time the area covered by Brunel's original terminus had fallen out of operational use.

Much of the station building has been listed Grade I.

Route

2 Exit from the platforms of Bristol Temple Meads station via the main ticketing gates to reach the station's main booking hall. If you find yourself on Station Approach, go back into the building by the main entrance (beneath the clock tower) and turn left within the booking hall. Exit the station building into the car park. Perform a quick right-and-left turn and continue ahead across the car park, beyond which cross a modern square with a multiple-use



building on your left. This area is under redevelopment for the city and for the University of Bristol.

There is a café and a pub in the building on your left.

Cross the modern S-shaped Valentine Bridge and follow the path out to Avon Street. Turn right, then turn left onto New Kingsley Road.

There is a small supermarket on Avon Street and a café on the corner of New Kingsley Road. The next refuelling opportunity on the route will be the café at Bristol Parkway station.

Follow the right-hand pavement of New Kingsley Road, passing a school on your right. Beyond the school, the street-name changes to Horton Street.

At the top of Horton Street, turn right onto Midland Road, and cross to its left-hand pavement using the light-controlled pedestrian crossing. Turn left onto St Philip's Road and follow its right-hand pavement. Where the road bends, carry on ahead onto a shared-use footpath and cycle path.

This is the Bristol and Bath Railway Path. It follows the line of the former Midland Railway route between the two cities. The railway opened in 1869, but the Great Western route was much more efficient, and the line had only minor local status, except for some holiday trains from the Midlands to Bournemouth. The line closed to passenger traffic in 1966, and closed completely in 1971.

The morning is, of course, the best time to be out walking, but 0830 on a weekday sees tidal waves of cyclists coming down the gradient into the city, either ignoring the *Pedestrian priority* signs or being self-importantly contemptuous of the signs and of other users.

The path passes some houses on the left, and then passes beneath St Philip's Causeway, a major distributor road. The last remains of the Midland Railway line may be glimpsed on your right. When you reach the next bridge, carrying



Valentine's Bridge and Temple Quay

Bristol and Bath Railway Path near Owen Square Park, travelling against the morning rush-hour flow



Lawrence Hill over the railway, you will find an exit path which is signposted to Lawrence Hill station.

3 The path continues to climb, and passes over the current railway. After passing beneath Devon Road, you will come to a school on the right. Cyclists are warned about the presence of crossing children.

Beyond the school, the path climbs to Rose Green Road, crossing it by a bridge.

There is an exit onto Rose Green Road on the right.

4 Beyond the Rose Green Road bridge, houses have been built recently which encroach on the line of the track, so there is a double bend on the path — beware of cyclists taking the blind corner at speed. About 70m beyond the bend, leave the railway path at a gate on your left to reach a branch of a street called Clay Bottom.

Turn right and follow the branch (parallel to the railway path) out to the main spine of Clay Bottom, where turn left. At the T-junction, turn right to descend the left-hand pavement. The street-name changes to The Glades half-way down. Where the street bends to the right, continue ahead on a footpath which descends a flight of steps into a small nature reserve. Cross a brook and ascent the other side of the valley to reach a street called Stonebridge Park.

Turn left to follow the right-hand pavement of Stonebridge Park to Royate Hill, where turn right to ascend the right-hand pavement to the top. Cross Fishponds Road by the divided light-controlled pedestrian crossing and turn left. After a few metres, enter Eastville Park on the right.

Eastville Park was purchased in 1889 by the City of Bristol from Sir Greville Smyth of Ashton Court, the council paying £30000 for the 30ha estate. Mature trees were retained during the landscaping as an urban park, and a serpentine lake feature was added. Today, the park is used for informal recreation and for amateur sports. Beware weekend mornings, when there are mass-participation “runs”

which clog up the paths used by the Bristol Rail Round. The boundary wall of the park, with its spear-head railings, has been listed Grade II. The ground falls away on the western side of the park, affording views across to Purdown and its distinctive transmission tower.

Turn left inside the park to walk parallel to Fishponds Road. At a path junction, turn right to follow a path to a dilapidated

Purdown transmission tower from Eastville Park



building, a long-closed set of changing rooms. Immediately beyond the building, turn right and take the left-hand of two paths, (not the one immediately adjacent to the blockhouse wall), which begins to descend. The path soon reaches a set of steps which lead down to the valley of the River Frome. There is an ornamental lake over to your left at valley level.

5 Turn right to follow the valley path, with the water on your left. Keep close to the river, and pass a stone weir. Beyond the weir, the path crosses the river by a footbridge. Turn right once across the bridge to continue upstream on the other bank.

At the next bridge, Wickham Bridge, cross the river and, after a few metres, take a path on the left to continue along the bottom of the valley. The path finally rises to meet Broom Hill: continue ahead on the left-hand pavement, crossing the River Frome.



There is a half-hourly bus service to the city centre from the bus stop on the other side of the road.

You will see signs for “snuff mills”: no tobacco was milled here, but one of the millers, whose smock was always covered in snuff, gained the nickname of “Snuffy Jack”, and the name was transferred to the mills.

Cross to the right-hand pavement and ascend the road to reach a mini-roundabout at the top. Cross over Park Road by the pedestrian crossing just to the right of the roundabout, and turn left to reach the Duchess Gate (or Broomhill Gate) of Stoke Park.

The Stoke Park Estate, which was transferred to the Berkeley family in 1337, remained in the family for over 500 years with a short gap following the Battle of Bosworth (1485), whereat the ten Berkeley fought on the losing side and the estate was seized, only to be returned by King Henry VII. Today, the 108ha estate is managed by Bristol City Council. It is freely open to the public at all times. The ridge at the top of the park is called Purdown: at the eastern

Top — Eastville Park lake

Above — Weir on the River Frome



*Dower House from
Duchess Pond*

end is the imposing Dower House (first raised in 1553), and at the western end, the white transmission tower (built in 1970 for the microwave telecommunications network, and now being used for radio and mobile telephone coverage).

6 Follow the path from the Duchess Gate, and pass beneath the M32, the short motorway spur from the M4 to the centre of Bristol. Turn left, and soon go through a gate on your right to reach a lake, with the Dower House prominent over to your right.

The lake (sometimes referred to as Duchess Pond) is used for angling, and the surrounds are home to the rare reed warbler and reed bunting birds.

Walk round the lake clockwise until you see a path leading off to the left. Take this path and go through another gate, out onto the open down.

Turn right and, drifting slightly left from the lake, follow a path up to the left of a valley, heading roughly in a west-north-westerly direction. Cattle graze the estate to keep down invasive scrub, so look out for the animals. At the top of the down, go through another gate (to keep the cattle where the council wants them) to reach the main ridge.

7 Turn right to follow the broad path along the ridge. Ignore paths which go off to the left, keeping now on an easterly line. Pass a deer sculpture on your right and descend to the park gate.

Turn right and follow the right-hand pavement of Jellicoe Avenue through a left-hand bend and then through a right-hand bend. Just before you reach a squeeze-point on Jellicoe Avenue, turn right to follow the right-hand pavement of Parnell Road until reach Thomas Way: you have a clock tower in front of you. Look to your right and you will see the Dower House.

The clock tower (1930) is all that remains of the “Stoke Park Colony”. In 1908, the Dower House became a hospital for what was then described as “feeble-minded children and mentally deficient adults”: at its peak, it had almost 2000 beds, housed in what was known as the Stoke Park Colony.

On the establishment of the National Health Service, the part of the estate occupied by the Colony, including the Dower House,

was transferred to the NHS. After the closure of the hospital, the hospital estate was sold to a developer, who moved in and built identikit houses across the estate.

Opposite Thomas Way, turn left along a path between rows of houses with mature trees on each side. At the far end of the path, turn right onto Lancelot Road for a few metres, then cross Stoke Lane by the refuge. Turn left along the right-hand pavement of Stoke Lane to reach the junction with Slade Baker Way.

8 Turn right onto Slade Baker Way and follow its right-hand pavement round the broad left-hand bend until you reach Thomas Snead Road, with a large complex of flats over to your left.

Turn right to follow Thomas Snead Road to its end, and continue out on a path. Bear right at a path junction, then turn left to follow a stony path through woodland. After about 500m, houses appear on your right and the path takes a left turn, then a right turn, to emerge onto Filton Road.

Turn left to follow the right-hand pavement of Filton Road. At the end of a row of houses, turn right to cut through onto the major road (also named Filton Road for some reason), and turn right to follow its right-hand pavement to the junction with Stoke Gifford Boulevard.

Cross the major road using three light-controlled pedestrian crossings and take the left-hand pavement of Stoke Gifford Bypass. Pass a bus stop and cross Oxleigh Way using the light-controlled pedestrian crossing.

9 Turn left to follow the right-hand pavement of Oxleigh Way as far as a drop-step on the kerb (if you reach a postbox, you have overshot), and turn right along a path through woodland.

After you have crossed a brook, turn left at a path junction and continue to another path junction, where bear right. This path leads out to Harry Stoke Road.

Turn right, then cross the road by the refuge to the right of a mini-roundabout. Turn left to follow the right-hand pavement of Church Road all the way to its end, passing the entrance to the Network Rail depot and keeping close to the railway embankment as you approach



Path south of Filton Road

Approaching Harry Stoke



Hatchet Road. Turn right to pass beneath the railway. The access road for Bristol Parkway station is on your right.

Bristol Parkway station was opened in 1972. It provides connections between the main line between London and South Wales, and the line between Birmingham and the south-west of England.

Bristol Parkway has a café and toilets outside the ticketing gates. There are frequent trains to Bristol Temple Meads, London, South Wales, the south-west, the Midlands and the north (including destinations as far away as Edinburgh).

Bristol Parkway to Severn Beach

15.7km; 80m ascent; 3hr 15min

Introduction

1 With the exception of some urban streets at the start and end of the section, this is a largely rural walk, with a precipitous descent from the M5 crossing onto the coastal plain (a note to be considered by anyone contemplating walking the route in reverse).

Among the bus routes which serve Bristol Parkway station, there is one which plies its way (hourly, but only every two hours on Sundays) between Parkway and Severn Beach, calling at Easter Compton on the way.

The only refuelling point, other than the café at Bristol Parkway station and a nearby pub (which will probably be closed if you are string the day's walk at Parkway station), is the tiny community shop (open seven days a week) at Easter Compton.

There are several stiles on this section, and mud may be encountered in the area to the west of the M5 crossing. Even in dry weather, boots are recommended for this section.

2 From the western end of the access road at Bristol Parkway station (and turning right if approaching from the station), follow the right-hand pavement of Hatchet Road away from the railway. Bear right to reach North Road and, crossing to use the left-hand pavement at a pedestrian crossing, follow it to its end. Here, as the main road sweeps round to the right and becomes Knightswood Road, turn left along Mead Road. Follow Mead Road to its end, and pass through a traffic barrier to reach Winterbourne Road.

3 Cross Winterbourne Road using the light-controlled pedestrian crossing and continue ahead on a lane.

This lane is signposted as Concorde Way, which is not the lane's name, but is the name of an (in the main) off-road walking and cycling route which links Stoke Gifford with Bristol at Cabot Circus.

Follow the lane through a traffic barrier and continue out to Bailey's Court Road, Cross the road and turn left to follow the right-hand pavement down towards a roundabout.

Just before you reach the roundabout, turn right to follow a path along the valley bottom, with a brook on the left and the sound of a road beyond it.

This path is part of the Community Forest path, which encircles Bristol in its 75km length.

After the main path crosses the brook by a footbridge, turn right to follow the path out to Bradley Stoke Way.



Savage's Wood

4 Pass beneath Bradley Stoke Way and continue for about 250m to reach a path junction, where turn left. Follow a clear path, passing school facilities on your left. Beyond the school, the path continues into Savage's Wood.

5 Follow the main path through Savage's Wood and ahead as if crosses a meadow section, before returning to the woodland. Where the path comes to a T-junction, turn right and

follow the path through a right-and-left double bend. Ascend to road level at the end of Campion Drive, and turn left through 180° to reach a path which takes you over Bradley Stoke Way.

Beyond the bridge, the path joins a lane (called *The Common East*. Follow the lane, bearing right at a fork (and still following the Community Forest Path) to reach Brook Way.

6 Make your way across Brook Way using the light-controlled pedestrian crossing and turn left.

Immediately, turn right onto a lane which is called, simply, *The Common*, and follow it until you reach Gloucester Road.

Turn left to follow the left-hand pavement of the busy Gloucester Road until you reach an underpass access beside a bus shelter.

Buses run from this stop to Bristol Parkway station.

7 Descend to cross Gloucester Road by the underpass. On emerging from beneath the road, the path bends right to reach a T-junction. Here, take the left-hand option which then bends right to reach Hempton Lane. Turn left to follow the left-hand pavement past a school on your left. Where Hempton Lane bends to the left, continue ahead to reach Park Avenue, within the Aztec West Business Park.

Park Avenue, Aztec West



Turn left along the left-hand pavement of Park Avenue, the business-park milieu being as antiseptic as expected.

Pass a large glass-walled building on your left, and cross over the end of Waterside Drive. Turn left to follow the right-hand pavement with a lake (part of the business park's water management scheme) on your right.

At the far end of the lake, continue ahead onto a path (still the Community Forest Path) to a point where there is a meadow ahead. Turn right here, your decision aided by the Community Forest Path sign, with the fence of the business park on your right.

The area of rough meadow to your left lies above twin rail tunnels which carry the line between England and Wales through the Severn Tunnel.

Follow the path, keeping the fence close on your left, to its very end, right up against the M5. Here, turn left to walk parallel to the motorway until you reach a footbridge. Turn right to cross the motorway.

8 On the far side of the motorway, the drop through Pegwell Brake is steep (hence the need for boots).

When you reach a road, turn left and immediately turn right onto a lane, still following the Community Forest Path. The lane executes a left-and-right double bend before descending to the next level of the coastal plain.

A grand vista opens out, with a glimpse of the (1960s) Severn Bridge piers, backed by the hills of Wales and the Forest of Dean, with the Cotswold Edge to the right in the distance.

Descend to the entrance to a stabling-ground for motor homes, and turn left onto an enclosed path before you reach the caravan park gateway. Follow this path which leads, via a small left-and-right double bend, to a cluster of farmhouses collectively known as Over.

9 Cross the road and take the path straight ahead, with Lower Over Farm immediately on your right, and follow the Community Forest Path in a west-south-westerly direction to a footbridge which leads into a wood.

If you find that you have, probably having followed the broad paths cut into the long grass, strayed too close to the power lines on the left, you will reach the woodland with a bulge into the field on your



Anti-corporatist nature on the outside of the business park's western fence

Below — The Forest of Dean and the Severn Bridge

Bottom — path management west of Over



right. Just turn right to follow the headland of the field round the bulge of the woodland on your left to reach the footbridge across the brook at the entrance to the wood.

Cross the footbridge and enter the wood, soon bearing slightly right. Pick your way along the muddy path to emerge at a farm lane, where turn left.

Follow the farm lane, or the footpath on the other side of the hedge on your left, to emerge into the village of Easter Compton onto Home Farm Way. Turn left and follow the right-hand pavement of the road round to the right to reach Main Road, the main road (no, really!) through Easter Compton.

There is a bus stop to the left with services to Bristol Parkway station: the stop across the road to the right serves Severn Beach station.

Cross the road and turn right, passing the bus stop for Severn Beach. Cross over the end of Church Road to come to the tiny community shop.

The shop is open seven days a week and stocks convenience items.

10 Continue along the left-hand pavement of Main Road until a metal barrier at the kerb hints at the débouchement of a path. Turn left to take this path, which leads to the churchyard. Go through the churchyard and out the other side until you reach a tarmac lane.

At this point, you leave the Community Forest Path, which continues straight ahead on its way to Hengrove and back to Bristol Parkway.

Turn right along the lane, which used to be a road until it was severed by the building of the M49, and follow it past Church Farm on the right. Pass between the boulder barriers and continue along the path.

After 900m, you will pass a footpath which crosses the lane. Almost 400m beyond that path crossing, you will see a stubby fingerpost leading pedestrians off to the right — **ignore it**. That path leads away off our route.

Keep to the tarmac path as it rises to pass beneath the south-eastern corner of the M49 junction's roundabout.

Below — Path leading from Main Road to church and to Church Farm, Easter Compton

Bottom — approach to the M49 and distribution park



Follow the path round to the right and then to the left to cross the motorway inside its roundabout.

11 Corkscrew to the left to pass beneath the motorway roundabout and bend to the left. Follow the path out to road level at a roundabout, with a budget hotel on your right.

Cross the road beyond the hotel, keeping the roundabout on your left. At the next roundabout, bear round to the right onto Palmer Avenue, and cross to its left-hand pavement by the pedestrian crossing.

Continue ahead through the Western Approach Distribution Park with the roadway over to your right — for much of the way, the path is separated from the roadside. Cross an access road from a roundabout on the road to your right, known as Dyer's Common.

12 At the access road from the next roundabout, bear slightly left to continue along the pathway, crossing two smaller roads. Ignore a bridleway sign pointing at 90° to the left, and continue ahead to reach Severn Road.

Cross Severn Road by means of a tripartite light-controlled pedestrian crossing and press ahead onto a path. Ignore a path leading off to the left, but keep on ahead for 550m. Take the left-hand bend in the path, then bend to the right to reach the bend in Church Road. Turn left to follow Church Road out to its end, where bear left to reach a mini-roundabout.

Turn right to cross the road by a refuge, with the roundabout on your right, and continue ahead along the left-hand pavement of Station Road. You will pass, on your right, a house called Crossing Cottage, and then you will go over a slight hump in the road, before you reach the entrance to Severn Bridge station.

The hump in the road is indeed the shadow of a level crossing which carried the railway north from Severn Beach station to join with the South Wales main line at Pilning. This would, if the tracks had not been obliterated, have given the opportunity for the Severn Beach line to loop back to Bristol via Filton Abbey Wood.

Severn Beach station has an hourly service to Bristol Temple Meads via Avonmouth and Portway Park and Ride

Below — Crossing Cottage is the house to the left of its name-board.

Bottom — the site of the former level crossing



stations. The village has two part-time cafés (each open for limited hours five days a week) and a bakery, all beyond the station (as are public toilets), but otherwise the tide seems to have gone out from the place.

Severn Beach to Portway

9.2km; 3m ascent; 2hr 42min

Introduction

1 There is no getting away from it — the second half of this mercifully short section is low on interest, being along a busy lorry-laden main road and the streets of Avonmouth. But into each life a little industrial dust must fall, so the walker will just buckle down and follow the roads.

The first part of this section, however, offers a complete contrast, with a stretch of sea wall (the first kilometre open to the shore) and then a grassy enclosed path next to the railway.

Route

2 From the station entrance at Severn Beach (turning left if exiting the station), make your way along the left-hand pavement of Station Road

You will notice, at the corner of Beach Road, a signpost for shops and toilets. There is a bakery open seven days a week, and a café open six hours a day (but which is closed on Sundays and Mondays). Ahead on Station Road, there is a café open six hours a day (but which is closed on Mondays and Tuesdays). And that's it.

Since the next café on the route is at Avonmouth, and the next shop directly on the route is 10km away just before it crosses the Avonmouth Bridge, this is a day to stock up before leaving home.

Follow Station Road to its end and ascend onto the sea wall. The Prince of Wales Bridge dominates the view, with the woodland above and behind Caerwent forming the horizon. Turn left and follow the concrete path along the sea

Below — The train towards Bristol waits at Severn Beach station

Bottom — The Prince of Wales Bridge carries the M4 across the Severn estuary





Top — View along the shoreline towards Portishead

Above — the path alongside the older sea wall

wall. Ahead, there are views along the shore to Portishead, with the Seabank power station chimney prominent on the left. The Severn is notorious for its tides, and you will find substantial pieces of driftwood.

After about a kilometre, the pristine concrete comes to an end, and the path becomes stony, with a tall and rusting corrugated version of the sea

wall on your right.

3 At New Pill Gout (the outflow of Red Rhine), the path crosses to the other side of the railway, and 250m later, having crossed into the City of Bristol, comes out onto Severn Road. Continue along the right-hand pavement of Severn Road for 350m, and leave it on the right to continue between the road and the railway on an enclosed grassy path.

This path is not an ideal surface, since the long grass tends to be slippery whether dry or wet. However, it is much better than the roadside. It really needs to be covered with gravel which is then compacted.

After following this path for 800m, you will cross Stuppill Rhine.

4 Beyond the bridge over the rhine (which is much smaller than any bridge over the Rhine!), the path continues for 800m before bending to the left to reach the ominously-named Smoke Lane. Cross the road with care and turn right along the left-hand pavement. Ascend to cross a railway (the route which was used by coal trains), and descend to reach a roundabout.

5 Cross Poplar Way West with the roundabout on your right, and follow the left-hand pavement of Smoke Lane for a little more than 1.5km (at the broad left-hand bend, the street-name changes to St Andrews Road) to reach the access road to St Andrews Road station.

Cross St Andrews Road using the light-controlled pedestrian crossing.

Since this is a short section, there is probably time to take a short detour to take in the remains of a remarkable piece of industrial architecture from the second half of the twentieth century— the Avonmouth coal silo. The best view of the silo is from the platform of St Andrews Road station.

Take the road to the station entrance (taking its left-hand turn), and cross the railway tracks by the footbridge before descending to the platform. Walk to the southern end of the platform for the best view.

Return to St Andrews Road by the same route.

During the 1970s, the Royal Portbury Dock was developed out of the marshland at the outflow of the River Avon, across the river from the established docks at Avonmouth.. A coal import terminal was built, and the incoming coal was poured onto a conveyor system which ran in a tunnel beneath the Avon. The coal was then raised on a sloping conveyor to the top of the tower (on the right of the picture, across the railway, and into a twin silo: the red-walled building on the left of the picture. Wagons were filled automatically as the coal train passed through the silo building: the whole operation could process 2500 tonnes of coal per hour. The coal was then hauled off to Didcot power station, or to West Aberthaw power station in Wales.



Avonmouth Coal Silo

In fact, the silo was only operational for about forty years, by which time there was no coal-fired power station at Didcot. The lower half of the rising conveyor has been dismantled, but the silo stands.

You will note the multiple sidings which now lie empty: in the past, these would have been packed with wagons carrying coal, oil and other freight. Now, about the only use the railway gets is the hourly train which runs back and forth on the single track between Avonmouth and Severn Beach.

6 Back at St Andrews Road, set off southbound on the right-hand pavement (turning left if you have just crossed St Andrews Road, or turning right if returning from the station). Follow the road for just over 1km to reach St Andrews Roundabout.

The roundabout marks the western end of the A4. The eastern end is at Holborn Circus in the City of London.

Cross over the end of King Road Avenue with the roundabout on your left, and continue along St Andrews Road to its end at the junction with McLaren Road. Bear right to follow McLaren Road to Richmond Terrace, where turn left. Turn right onto Gloucester Road to reach Portview Road at Avonmouth station.

There is a traditional breakfast café on the corner where you arrive at Gloucester Road. If you continue along Avonmouth Road (the continuation of Richmond Terrace beyond Gloucester Road, you will reach a small parade of shops on the right. Here, there is a fish and chip shop, a bakery/café, and a convenience shop with post

office. If you are continuing towards Portway, take Collins Road on the right beyond the shops to reach Portview Street, where turn left to continue your journey towards Portway.

7 At Avonmouth Station, turn left onto Portview Road, passing on your left the most impressive building on the street. Continue along Portview Street, passing the Masonic Hall and a pub on your right. Cross to the right-hand pavement at the junction with Collins Street (where the diversion via the Avonmouth shops rejoins the route) and continue to the junction with Portway, beneath the M5 Avonmouth Bridge, where turn right.

To continue on the low level route to Bristol via Sea Mills, stay on the right-hand pavement.

For Portway Park and Ride station, and to continue towards Bristol via the M5 bridge and Pill, cross Portway by the divided light-controlled pedestrian crossing to reach the end of West Town Road (the route to the M5 bridge is now straight ahead). For Portway Park and Ride station, turn right and follow the left-hand pavement of Portway to the entrance to the Park and Ride area, crossing Portway by a divided light-controlled pedestrian crossing.

Trains run between Portway/Avonmouth and Bristol Temple Meads every half-hour. There are frequent buses from the Park and Ride to central Bristol (which have a stop at Temple Meads station).

Portway to Bristol Temple Meads via Leigh Woods

16.3km; 229m ascent; 3hr 38min

Introduction

1 This is an exhilarating section which combines riverside walking with the delights of Leigh Woods, the bustle of Clifton, and a walk along the harbour and through Queen Square to Bristol Temple Meads station. For some walkers, though, there is a 'but' of some consequence. There are two high-level crossings of the River Avon to negotiate.

The Clifton Suspension Bridge will not present problems to anyone with mild acrophobia: the walkway is lined on the river side with mesh which extends beyond head height, and there will always be others, including bridge staff, around.

It is the other bridge which will present more serious problems for many more people. The M5 Avonmouth Bridge is above ground level — for much of the way over 30m above ground level, and there are only conventional railings. Add to that the fact that the path is elevated for about 1.5km (20 minutes or more for most people), and the potential problems mount. Then there is the moving air which buffets the walker — even on a flat-calm day, there will be gusts from passing traffic on the motorway. Finally, there will be cyclists and motorcyclists ignoring the speed limit and travelling at much more than 25kph.

*Top — Portview Road seen
from Avonmouth station*

*Above — Avonmouth
Masonic Hall*



If any of the above paragraph gives you a moment's pause for thought, cross the bridge off your route. Don't risk your own safety and others' time and efforts: admire the bridge from below, and leave it at that.

There is an emergency telephone at each end of the bridge span, but the line goes directly to the Samaritans, whose volunteers need no unnecessary workload. There is no other way of calling for help, save flagging down another bridge user, possibly thus increasing that person's trauma level.

There are two options for getting to Bristol without using the bridge. There is the alternative route via Sea Mills (12.9km, *see* page 34 for the route description), or you may take one of the frequent buses from central Bristol towards Portishead, alighting at the Station Road stop in Pill, from where it is a simple walk of 140m along Station Road to reach the convenience shop at the top of Chapel Row, leaving you with 13.3km of walking to reach Temple Meads station.

The route is devoid of shops between the convenience shop in Pill and the multifarious opportunities in Clifton (though you may find a coffee van at the car park in Leigh Woods).

Route

2 If you are arriving at Portway Park and Ride station, follow the signs for "buses and pedestrian exit" to arrive on Portway. Cross the road using the divided light-controlled pedestrian crossing and turn left. Follow the right-hand pavement, crossing over the end of Grove Leaze and the blocked-off end of Ermine Way, to reach West Town Road (underneath the bridge). Cross West Town Road and turn right along its left-hand pavement.

This is where the route from Avonmouth station is joined.

Follow the left-hand pavement of West Town Road to its far end at Lower High Street.

There is a convenience shop on the right at the junction.

Turn left and follow the left-hand pavement to the bridge, and turn left onto the footpath/cycleway. Note that this path is also used by scooters, motorcycles and invalid carriages, and also by bridge maintenance vehicles.

3 Take the gently rising path, the housebacks on the left dropping away beneath you. You will reach, on the right-hand side of the path, an emergency telephone inside a cowling. This line puts you straight through to the Samaritans (who may be contacted at any time on 116 123).

This is the last point at which you may change your mind about the wisdom of attempting the bridge crossing — **it is far better to back down now than to break down later.**



Cross the bridge without dawdling, always listening and looking out for other bridge users and being wary of gusts of wind. Most people will probably cross with eyes fixed straight forward.

On the far side, at a matching emergency telephone, the path turns left, then curls on its descent first to the right and then to the left, arriving at ground level beside a steel sculpture of a giant hammer and spanner.

4 Follow the path ahead from the Hammer and Spanner, and pass beneath the railway line which leads to the Royal Portbury Dock, and continue past some houses on the left to the point where the street turns sharp left.

Take a footpath ahead which squeezes between housebacks on the left and a railway line on the right. At the far end of the path, continue along a street next to the railway to ascend to bridge height (over the railway). Do not cross the railway, but make your way round the corner at the convenience shop, and continue ahead with the railway still immediately to your right, past the shop doorway on Chapel Row.

If you are arriving in Pill from the Station Road bus stop, take the right-hand pavement of Station Road, crossing the railway bridge, to reach the convenience shop, turning right onto Chapel Row.

The railway bridge here is named the Pill station overbridge. Pill station was situated here, opening in 1867 and closing in 1964. Freight trains use the line to and from Royal Portbury Dock. There are plans to re-open the line to Portishead to passenger traffic,

The easiest look down from the bridge — the Portway Park and Ride from the point where the mesh walling ends

Hammer and Spanner





Pill marina

with a station at Pill, but these plans have been postponed on several occasions.

5 Descend Chapel Row, continuing ahead down steps where the road swings left, to reach Underbanks at the bottom. Cross the road and climb to the sea wall for a view of Pill marina, then turn right and follow a path towards the railway, cutting slightly left to the right-hand end of some houses opposite on Watch House Road.

Here, take a tarmac path which curls sharply to the right as it ascends to reach a meadow, bending left to parallel the railway. Pass to the right of a basketball cage, then take a left fork and go half-way round a circular path to continue on a course just south of east. Continue ahead along a road, turning right at a junction and turning left to pick up the path again on its same straight course, leading to Macrae Road.

All this modern housing has been built on the estate of a former isolation hospital, Ham Green Hospital.

Cross Macrae Road and take Hart Close opposite, bearing left to follow Chapel Pill Lane, with offices on your left. Descend Chapel Pill Lane, passing a row of houses on the left to reach, on the right, Ham Green Lake, an angling pond. Continue along the lane as far as a gateway for Chapel Pill Farm. Here, take a path to the right of the gateway, going through a width restrictor.

The path is the River Avon Trail. It is a public footpath (and not a bridleway), but cyclists need no encouragement to use the footpath, which is not broad enough for shared use. As elsewhere on this route, the *Pedestrian priority* command is honoured almost entirely in the breach.

6 The route now follows the River Avon Trail to the entrance to Leigh Woods.



The path, formerly a towpath, boasts a frequent succession of mooring bollards alongside, as it follows the river upstream. Across the river, you will glimpse the houses of Shirehampton, with an old whitewashed building above the river on a bluff.

The Shirehampton Bend of the River Avon and (on the right) the Powder House

That building is the Shirehampton Powder House, and dates from 1775. The Port of Bristol banned the carrying of explosives on ships using the harbour, and the Powder House acted as a “left luggage office”, the explosives being hoisted out of the ships on their way upriver, to be stored and returned to the owners as the ships sailed downriver. Today, this would be a hazardous operation at any state of the substantial Avon tidal range, but in former days, a wider river and small-draught shipping would have made the process easier.

Leigh Woods

Below — from the riverside

Bottom — from within

Beyond the Powder House, the path (with the river) executes a broad bend to the right, eventually settling on a south-easterly direction, and following it until you are opposite Sea Mills, at the outflow of the River Trym.



7 The path continues along the riverside, reaching the northern tip of Leigh Woods. After you have rounded a small inlet, passing a railway bridge on your right, you will ascend to a path junction.

8 Here, turn right and ascend, following the signs for Clifton, to reach a forestry track. Turn left along this track, still following the



signs to Clifton. The track ascends further, eventually passing a building on the right. Pass a gate and rise to Leigh Woods car park on the right.

You may be fortunate enough to find a coffee van open for business at the car park.

9 Continue along the long straight access road to the car park: parking extends for some way at the depth of one vehicle on each side of the road.

Right at the far end of the car parking area, about 300m from the main car park (and the coffee van), turn left onto a track just within the right-hand edge of the woodland. After 300m, the edge of the woods moves away from the path, which continues within the woods for 240m to reach a path junction. Turn sharp right, then after 80m, bear left to reach the National Trust's Park Rangers' headquarters.

There is an interpretive display on the wall of the Ranger Centre building, the first one on the left.

10 Keep the Rangers' buildings on your left, and after 90m, take a path to the left (once again, signposted towards Clifton) which leads out to North Road, in Leighwoods (the settlement runs the two words together in its name, at least in some instances).

If you decide not to cross the Clifton Suspension Bridge, you may take an adjacent path (called Nightingale Way) within the woods which drops to river level, from where you may pick up the River Avon Trail and cross the river and the harbour to reach Hotwells.

Turn left to follow North Road all the way to a sharp right turn, from where there are glimpses of the Avon Gorge through the trees on the left.

Take the bend to the right, then bend to the left, to reach Bridge Road, where the cable pier of the famous Clifton Suspension Bridge looms up in front of you. Advance to the visitor centre on the left-hand pavement.

There may be a coffee stall on the right-hand pavement just before you reach the bridge.

There is a walkway on each side of the road across the bridge. The downstream (left-hand) walkway gives views of the Avon Gorge and the Observatory, while the upstream (right-hand) walkway affords a panoramic view over the city. Bridge maintenance may make your choice for you if one walkway has been closed for works. There is no bridge toll for pedestrians, pedal cycles or horses (with their riders) — although the Clifton Suspension Bridge Act allows for a 5p toll, it is not currently collected. It is the tolls which pay for the upkeep of the bridge, and the

The Avon Gorge seen from North Road, Leighwoods



Clifton Suspension Bridge Trust (the charity responsible for the bridge) welcomes donations at the Visitor Centre.

The Clifton Suspension Bridge was planned by Isambard Kingdom Brunel (1806-59), and work started in 1831, but was halted due to the Bristol Riots (the rioters demonstrating against the House of Lords' rejection of the Second Reform Bill), and several subsequent periods of financial instability caused further postponements in works (echoed, perhaps, in the present-day travails in the project to electrify the railway line to Bristol). Meanwhile, Brunel was working on a suspension footbridge over the River Thames: his Hungerford Bridge opened in 1840. When the original Hungerford Bridge was dismantled so that the Charing Cross Railway Bridge could be built, the design for the Clifton Bridge incorporated the recycled cables of the Hungerford Bridge.

Brunel died before the Clifton Bridge was completed, and the final design of the bridge took on modifications drawn up by Brunel's successor in charge of construction, William Barlow (the designer of the trainshed for St Pancras station in London).

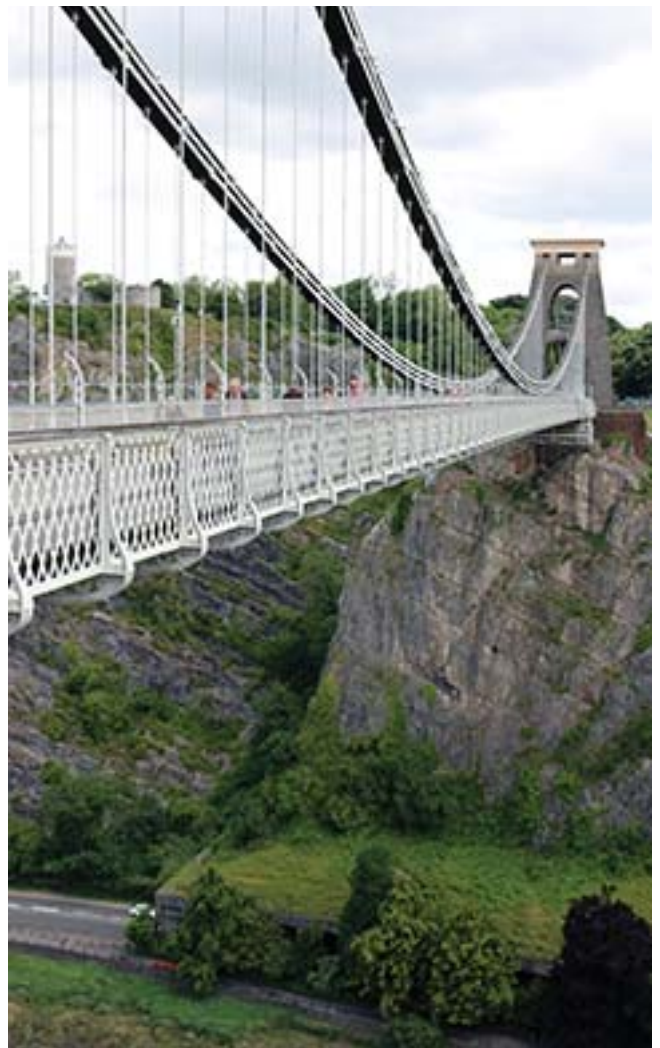
The bridge's road deck stands 101m above the river level at high water. It is formed of two layers of wooden planking, which is covered with asphalt made to a specification that allows for very thin layers to be applied (to keep the weight down to only 1500 tonnes).

The final flight of Concorde passed over the bridge on its way to Filton Aerodrome.

11 Cross the bridge, keeping moving to avoid knots of people. On arrival at the Clifton end, continue ahead.

On the left-hand side of the road, there is a café and toilets operated by the Clifton Suspension Bridge Trust.

12 Continue ahead, with the parkland on your left, until you reach the major junction at the Manila War Memorial (erected in 1767, commemorating the Seven Years' War of 1756-63 which re-drew the European map of North America). At the junction, turn right to follow the right-hand pavement of Clifton Down Road as far as Royal York Villas.



Clifton Suspension Bridge from the Leighwoods pier

Clifton Suspension Bridge, Clifton pier and cables



You will find all manner of shops, cafés, restaurants and pubs in Clifton.

13 Turn right, and follow the left-hand pavement of Royal York Crescent, with Royal York Villas on your left. Where the road forks, take the left-hand option (York Gardens) which descends as it bends to the left.

At the junction with Cornwallis Crescent (on your left), continue ahead on the steep descent of Granby Hill, still using the left-hand pavement, as far as Hope Chapel Hill, where turn left.

Descend the left-hand pavement of Hope Chapel Hill, passing the eponymous building (named after Lady Hope) on the left. At the bottom of the hill, pass Dowry Square on the left and join Hotwell Road.

Pass a petrol station on the left, then use the next light-controlled pedestrian crossing to cross to the right-hand pavement at the entry to Poole's Wharf. Turn left to follow the right-hand pavement to the end of the block, where turn right to reach the harbourside and turn left.

At this point, the low-level alternative route from Portway rejoins the main route.

14 Follow the harbourside, with the water to your right, as the path goes round a lazy right-hand bend. Across the harbour, you will see SS Great Britain, all decked out with bunting.

The *Great Britain* was the second of the Great Western Steamship Company's large ships, and indeed, was the world's largest when launched in 1843. The ship became the first iron-hulled vessel to cross the Atlantic Ocean, in a voyage of 12 days during 1845.. It carried migrants to Australia, and was later used as a warehouse in the Falkland Islands before being scuttled in 1937. In 1970, Sir Jack Hayward (probably best known as the owner of Wolverhampton Wanderers FC) paid for the ship to undergo sufficient repairs to be towed from Port Stanley to Bristol, where further work was

undertaken to bring the ship to the condition we see today. It is registered in the National Historic Fleet.

Follow the harbourside path. You will soon reach a memorial bust of Samuel Plimsoll, who devised what is known as the Plimsoll Line marking the safe loading limits for shipping.

Samuel Plimsoll (1824-98) was born in Bristol, but the family moved to Sheffield a short time later, and he spent the rest of his childhood in Penrith. He was elected MP for Derby in 1867, and tried unsuccessfully to pass a Bill regulating safety on ships, particularly in terms of loading limits, the failure being generally

SS Great Britain, seen across the harbour



accepted as the work of shipowning MPs. A similar (though in Plimsoll's view, inadequate) Bill was passed in 1876. His brief residency in Bristol as a baby has not deterred the city from celebrating his memory.

During the 1920s, "sand shoes" were developed with a canvas upper and a rubber sole. It is said that, at some point during the 1870s, the shoes became known as plimsolls because if water rose above the line of the rubber, the wearer was doomed to get wet. However, this may be simply an urban legend about urban leg-ends.

At a chimney, turn left along an alley, then turn right to cross an inlet. You will need several turns to keep between the harbour and the new developments (residential, commercial and cultural) at Canon's Marsh, and there is always the possibility of diversion if part of the public realm is cordoned off for an event.

In the middle of the twentieth century, Canon's Marsh was a mess of railway sidings, gasworks and warehouses (as were other harbourside areas of Bristol). By the 1960s, the railways had been taken up (or covered with tarmac). By the 1970s, the opening of the Royal Portbury Dock completed the move of commercial craft away from the city: Avonmouth and Portbury were the landing-stages.

Some of the old warehouses and other shipping-related buildings (the offices which form the portal to Poole's Wharf, for example) survive to serve other purposes, but the bulk of the area has been regenerated since the millennium in similar fashion to post-industrial riversides in London, Glasgow and elsewhere. Shiny new museum buildings sit alongside trendy bars and trendier luxury flats: the little ferries which ply the harbour between Hotwells and Temple Quay seem somewhat anachronistic as the yachts in the marinas tower over them.

By whatever route you can, you will arrive at Pero's Bridge, a footbridge across the harbour.

15 Cross Pero's Bridge and continue ahead, crossing Prince Street (with the Bristol Hotel on the left) and following the right-hand pavement of Royal Oak Avenue



Samuel Plimsoll

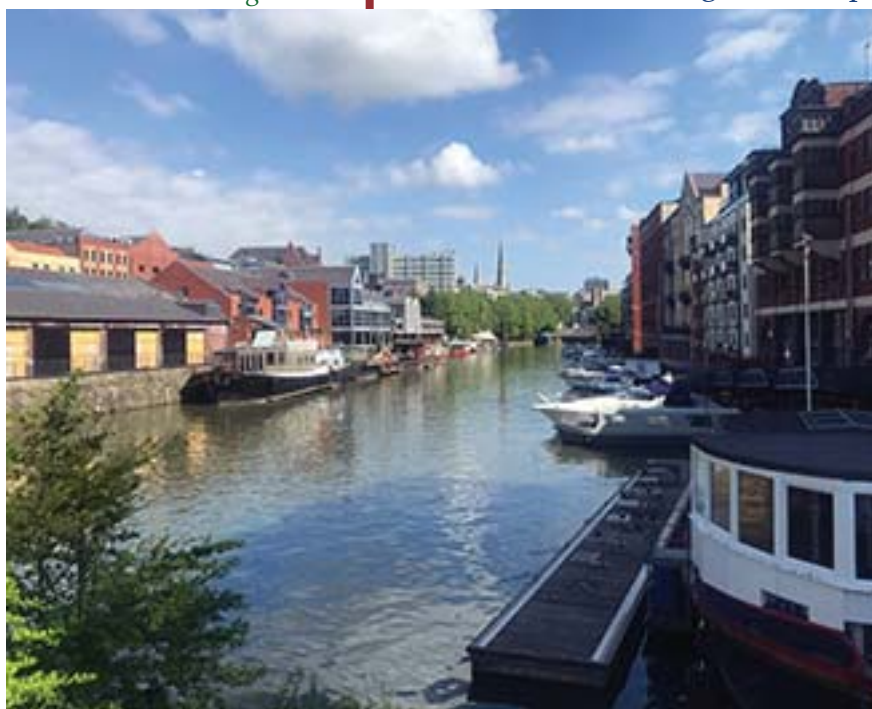


Pero's Bridge



29 Queen Square

The Floating Harbour from Redcliffe Bascule Bridge, towards Bristol Bridge



for the short distance required to reach Queen Square.

Queen Square is a formal square with period houses on its four sides. Pathways are laid around its perimeter, and eight pathways converging at an equestrian statue in the centre. Statue ... Queen Square ... now whoever could that be? Ah, yes, King William III. Predictably, the fine buildings of the square are often in demand as locations for film or television work.

Follow the south side of Queen Square ahead, either on the pavement or on the perimeter pathway within the square.

At the far end, continue ahead and cross over Welsh Backs at a pedestrian crossing-point (no zebra crossing nor light controls) and cross the Redcliffe Bascule Bridge.

Redcliffe Bascule Bridge was built in 1938, but had to be rebuilt four years later after it suffered wartime bomb damage. It is the highest (as in “farthest from the sea”) movable bridge over the Floating Harbour, so any vessel which cannot pass beneath Bristol Bridge (450m to the north, with a clearance of 4m) is restricted to the dock

area of Welsh Backs. The Bristol Harbour ferries, however, are able to negotiate the fixed bridges as far as their upstream terminus on Temple Quay at Valentine’s Bridge.

Bristol Bridge (listed Grade II and off-route) gave its name to the city — in its simplest form, Bristol means “the place at the bridge”. There has been a bridge at that point since Saxon times, with the first fortified bridge being built during the thirteenth century.

On the far side of the bascule bridge, cross over the end of Redcliff Backs. On the corner ahead is a brick building (dating from 1897) which was formerly occupied by the Western Counties Agricultural Co-operative Association. Pass to the right of this building along Freshford Lane, and cross Redcliff Street using the pedestrian crossing. Keep a car park immediately on your right as you continue ahead onto Portwall Lane.

Cross over St Thomas Street, and continue along Portwall Lane. At the traffic barrier, pass through and ease slightly to the right. Pass behind a bus shelter and reach the left-hand pavement of Redcliffe Way. Follow the left-hand pavement to the junction with Temple Gate.

Turn right to cross Redcliffe Way by the light-controlled pedestrian crossing to join the right-hand pavement of Temple Gate. Cross to the left-hand pavement using the divided light-controlled pedestrian crossing, and ascend Station Approach to reach the main entrance to Bristol Temple Meads station, and the end of the Bristol Rail Round.

The route has led through many facets of Bristol, from its railway heritage to lush parks and woodlands, from the antiseptic order of a business park's manicured landscape to the uncompromising industrial (and equally bleak post-industrial) sites in the docks and elsewhere, and from riverside paths to high bridges. A patchwork of landscape and architectural diversity, only exceeded in scale by the sheer diversity of the city and its people.



*Bristol Temple Meads:
External and internal
architectural detail*

Portway to Poole's Wharf via Sea Mills

10.3km; 53m ascent; 2hr 08min

Introduction

1 This alternative low-level route between Portway and Bristol Harbour, which avoids the two high-level river crossings, splits into two very different parts. For the first two-thirds of its distance, the route follows a path close to the river. Where this path gives out, the walk through the Avon Gorge is on the pavement of the A4. There is a short stretch of harbourside walking to reach the point, at Poole's Wharf, where the alternative route rejoins the main route for the final push through the city centre to Temple Meads station.

The point of divergence is at the junction of Portway and Portview Road in Avonmouth, and some walkers will have started the day at Avonmouth, but for many people, the alternative route will start at Portway Park and Ride station, and the route description below starts there.

Route

2 From the platform at Portway Park and Ride station, follow the signs for "buses and pedestrian exit" to arrive on Portway. Cross the road using the divided light-controlled pedestrian crossing and turn left. Follow the right-hand pavement, crossing over the end of Grove Leaze and the blocked-off end of Ermine Way, to reach the corner of West Town Road (underneath the bridge). Cross Portway using the divided light-controlled pedestrian crossing and turn left along its right-hand pavement.

The M5 Avonmouth Bridge, seen from the entrance to Lamplighter's Marsh



This road crossing is where the route from Avonmouth station is joined.

Take the right-hand pavement of Portway as far as the next set of traffic lights and turn right to follow the right-hand pavement of West Town Road, passing and re-passing beneath the bridge above. Cross the railway, and turn left onto a path.

This is Lamplighter's Marsh, an area of marsh, meadow

and wasteland, each of which has its own ecology. The area, including the rewilding wasteland (which was used for military purposes during the Great War and the Second World War, and was previously a brickmaking area) is a local nature reserve. Some locals are puzzled by the council's reluctance to "clean up the site", which contains important habitats.



*Chapel Pill river light,
opposite the Daisy Field*

Follow the path as it makes its way between the railway and the riverside, later joining an access road for Lamplighter's Quay. Pass a gate to come out at the corner of Station Road at a pub.

The pub (inevitably, it is called the Lamplighters, and has been there since 1760) serves a simple range of food during opening hours, and offers local ales, ciders and other drinks.

3 Continue across the pub frontage onto a meadow (known locally as the Daisy Field). Keep to the right of a children's play area, tucked in close to the river, and follow the path past sportsfields on your left.

Beyond the sportsfields, follow the riverside path until a large gap opens up between groups of houses on your left. Make your way up to the left to reach a pavement beyond the gap, with houses on the left. These houses are part of Shirehampton.

Follow the pavement as far as Northleach Walk. Turn left to reach a road, where turn left again. Turn right onto Nibley Road, which bears half-right at the junction with Dursley Road, and ascend to reach and cross a bridge over the railway.

4 Turn right to follow a path (signposted as the Bristol Link of the Severn Way) which runs parallel to the railway, rising to reach a layby on Portway.

5 Take a path (still the Bristol Link route) from the far end of the layby onto a scrubby meadow.

Ahead, you will see the village of Sea Mills, with Leigh Woods as the backdrop on the far side of the river.

The path follows its course, keeping close to the railway (not that you would realise



*Sea Mills and Leigh Woods
from the path east of
Shirehampton*



Left — steep staircase down



*Right — Severn Way
Bristol Link waymark,
with Horseshoe Point
River Light just visible
in the background*

that fact for part of the journey), the term “low-level route” being mocked by a succession of steep staircases (up and down), until the route drops far enough to pass beneath the railway.

Beyond the railway bridge, turn left to follow a clear path, helped at certain times in the growing season by Severn Way guide-posts, to reach the mouth of the River Trym. Turn left to follow the path beneath the railway (being aware of the low headroom). The remains of the watermill, a stone barrage, become visible ahead once you have passed beneath the tracks.

The term *Seamill* has nothing to do with the sea or tidal water, it is a measure of size, one *seam* (or packhorse load) being the grinding capacity. The mill is first recorded in the early part of the fifteenth century, but it seems to have ceased operations before the end of the eighteenth century.

The map might suggest that the route crosses the River Trym by the road bridge, giving rise to forbidding thoughts about the ascent (and the route) to road level, and it looks as if there might be a way towards the bridge by following the boundary fence of a football ground on the left.

Do not, however, drift to the left towards the football ground, but continue alongside the River Trym to pass beneath the road bridge. You will soon reach a path junction: take the right-hand option to cross the River Trym by a narrow footbridge, with negligible ascent..

On the far side, turn right to pass beneath the road again. Follow Sea Mills Lane ahead to reach Sea Mills station.

Roman remains have been discovered at Sea Mills which suggests that this was to port of Abona (“port on the Avon”) on the Roman route between Bath and Caerwent — it would have been the only port in this area of the Severn estuary.

After the Great War, Sea Mills was one of the many places around the country which were chosen for the development of “homes fit for heroes”, and the Sea Mills Garden Suburb was born. It was during excavation to clear the land for these houses that the significance of the Roman port was to be appreciated.

Sea Mills station has two trains per hour in each direction. Upstream, all trains go to Bristol Temple Meads. Downstream, all trains go to Avonmouth, with one train per hour going on to Severn Beach.

6 Cross the railway at the end of the platform (or use the underpass on the right) and continue along Sea Mills Lane to the river, where turn left to follow the road to its end.

This was the site of an important signal station for river traffic. Today, the location signals the start of the final 1.5km of rural path in the section.

Continue on a path past the houses, then pass between allotment gardens and the river. Pass some impressive (but highly lethal) mudflats beyond the end of the allotment gardens: on no account attempt to get closer to the river than the path.

The path takes a left bend, becoming hemmed in tightly between the river and the A4 up to your left, and its final piece of interest is the clear view of the mini-cliffs which demonstrate the geology of the other bank of the river. After you pass the geology lesson, look out for a set of stone steps rising to your left.



Above — The Trym flows home to the sea

Below — Avon mudflats, with Leigh Woods behind





At first sight, it may look as if the riverside path continues ahead, but it simply disappears into the mud. You must take the final opportunity to leave the riverside.

Take, therefore, these steps and rise to reach the pavement of the busy A4 as it makes its way through the Avon Gorge.

7 Turn right to follow the right-hand pavement of

Top — bedding planes beneath Leigh Woods

Above — The wall of the Avon Gorge opposite Leigh Woods

Below — Southbound view of Clifton Suspension Bridge

the A4, always busy, always noisy.

There may be plenty of buses plying the A4 but, to one's disappointment, there are no bus stops.

Follow the pavement steadily, eyes on the river and the woods on the far side, until you reach the moment which lifts the spirit — the first sighting of the Clifton Suspension Bridge.



8 As you pass through the Avon Gorge, more geology shows up. Across the river, the rock strata show up clearly in an area without tree cover, while across the A4, there is a sheer wall of rock 85m high, the patterns also showing clearly.

But with every step, the thrill of the bridge edges up a notch. Then suddenly, you round the final bend, and the bridge is up there (100m up there!), silhouetted against the sky.

The Clifton Suspension Bridge was planned by Isambard Kingdom Brunel (1806-59), and work started in 1831, but was halted due to the Bristol Riots (the rioters demonstrating against the House of Lords' rejection of the Second Reform Bill), and several subsequent periods of financial instability caused further postponements in works (echoed, perhaps, in the present-day travails in the project to electrify the railway line to Bristol). Meanwhile, Brunel was working on a suspension footbridge over the River Thames: his Hungerford Bridge opened in 1840. When the original Hungerford Bridge was dismantled so that the Charing Cross Railway Bridge could be built, the design for the Clifton Bridge incorporated the recycled cables of the Hungerford Bridge.

Brunel died before the Clifton Bridge was completed, and the final design of the bridge took on modifications drawn up by Brunel's successor in charge of construction, William Barlow (the designer of the trainshed for St Pancras station in London).

The bridge's road deck stands 101m above the river level at high water. It is formed of two layers of wooden planking, which is covered with asphalt made to a specification that allows for very thin layers to be applied (to keep the weight down to only 1500 tonnes).

The final flight of Concorde passed over the bridge on its way to Filton Aerodrome.

9 At the point where the path passes beneath the bridge, the roadway passes through a tunnel. Soon after you have passed beneath the bridge, you will reach a dilapidated pier: this was the pier for paddle-steamers bringing visitors to the bridge and the gorge.

Across the road from the pier, you will see a curious building set into the rock on the other side of the road. This is the lower station of the Clifton Rocks Railway.

The Clifton Rocks Railway was an underground funicular railway (that must have been a fun trip!) which connected Clifton with the paddle-steamer pier opposite the lower station inside the rock of the Avon Gorge. The service opened in 1893, but closed in 1934. There have been a

The Leighwoods pier of the Clifton Suspension Bridge from the paddle steamer pier





The lower station of the Clifton Rocks Railway

few attempts to bring it back to life, but nothing has ever come of these plans.

Pass the crumbling remains of the paddle steamer pier and continue to follow the right-hand pavement round the left-hand bend at the lock at the foot of the harbour. Pass beneath the Plimsoll Swing Bridge and let yourself onto the harbourside through a gate. Follow the harbourside (here, the Cumberland Basin), returning to the road just before the next bridge to cross Cumberland Basin Road.

Return to the harbourside and continue along the path,

crossing the entrance to Poole's Wharf Marina by a footbridge. Bear left to round a youth activity centre to reach the end of the alternative route where it rejoins the main route.

The onward route between Poole's Wharf and Bristol Temple Meads station is described starting on page 30.