

Surface condition report for the South Downs Way (Restricted Byway 2760) at Truleigh Hill, West Sussex.

Introduction

The South Downs National Park Authority (SDNPA) is the lead partner of the South Downs Way National Trail Partnership, which oversees the management and strategic direction of the South Downs Way National Trail (SDW). The SDNPA carries out maintenance, including surface repairs to the SDW on behalf of the three Local Highway Authorities (HCC, WSCC & ESCC) that cover the South Downs National Park.

The South Downs Way has a dedicated budget that is used to maintain the surface, signage and access infrastructure along its route. Each year the Trail managers identify and prioritise sections path along the SDW (120 miles) that require repair and improvement to allow safe use by the public.

In January 2022, the National Trail Officer inspected the Trail surface at Truleigh Hill between Warren Valley Farm (at the end of the metalled road) and Edburton Hill, to assess its suitability for public use. Please refer to Map 1 below, which divides this stretch of Trail into four sections. This report details the condition of each section as to whether it is suitable for the intended public use, as well as some suggestions to help maintain the surface for private use by residents and land managers.

The term, 'public use', refers to the classification of the public right of way. In this case, the legal classification of the public rights is a Restricted Byway. This means that walkers, equestrians, cyclists and horse-drawn carriages have a legal right to pass and re-pass along this path. Public use does not extend to the use of motorised vehicles. Residents and local land managers may well have private access rights along the trackway. These are separate rights and it is recognised that the suitability of the surface for public access may be different to the needs of private access.

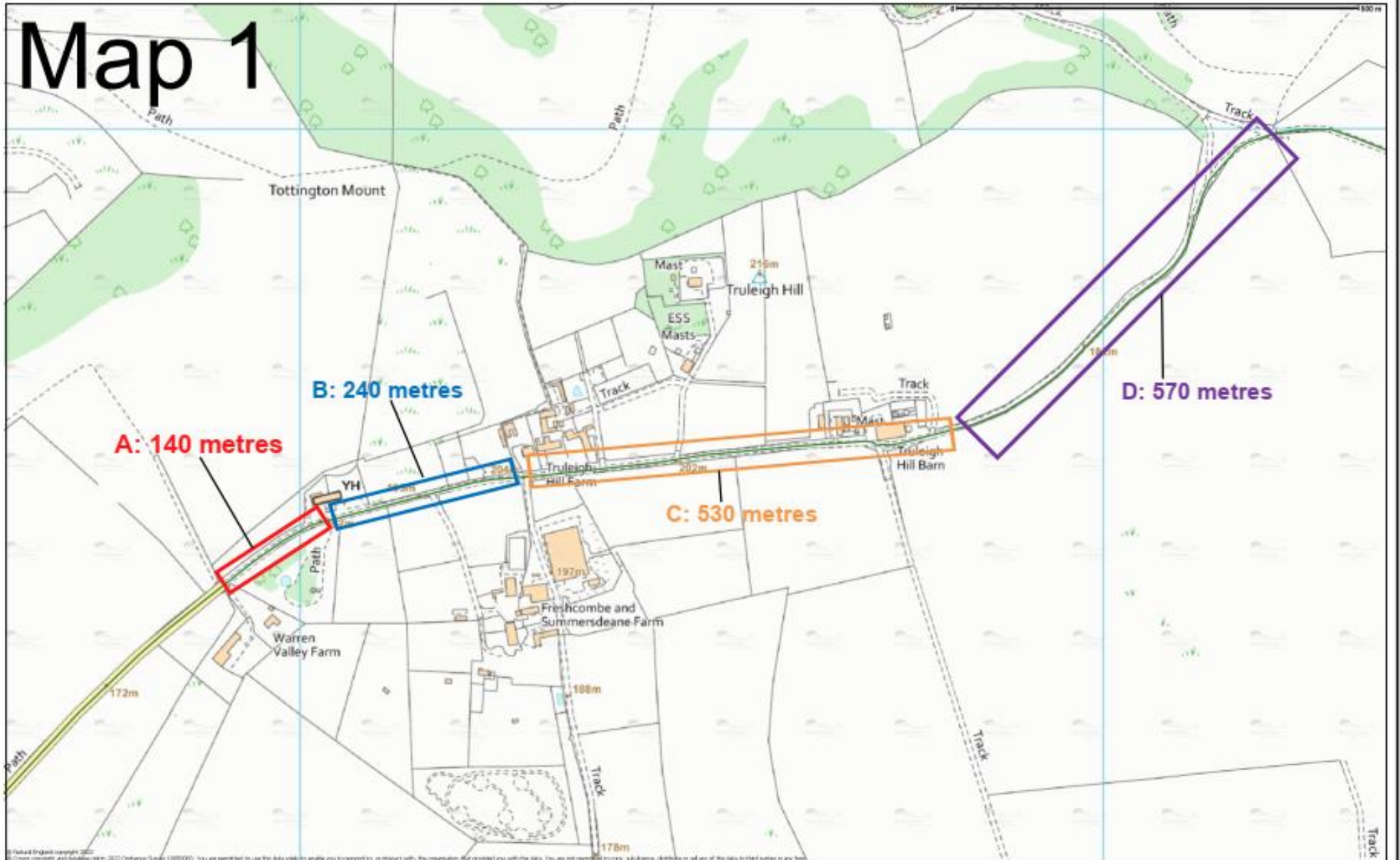
Previous repairs (please refer to Map 1)

In financial year 2013/14: The SDNPA commissioned contractors to carry out repairs to section D. This entailed re-profiling the trackway, creating drainage grips and importing cobbled chalk to raise levels.

In financial year 2015/16: Section C was repaired by the SDNPA. Drainage grips were created and stone was imported to raise levels.

In 2016, local landowner, Annie Brown, carried out repairs to Sections A and B.

Map 1



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Scale 1:4538



SDW surface condition: sections A, B, C, & D



Current Condition: Section A

This section has several potholes and there is evidence that vehicles have been driving on the verge to avoid these, which has consequently caused tree roots to become exposed at the edges of the trackway (please see photos below). Despite the potholes, the general condition of the surface here does not impede public access and is suitable for public use.

Section A is regularly used by motorised vehicles and unsealed surfaces will start to degrade fairly quickly if frequently used by vehicles, especially heavy machinery/lorries. To improve private access the potholes should be filled and ideally addressed early on before they worsen.



Current Condition: Section B

This section is showing signs of damage caused by surface water run-off, mainly on the southern edge of the track (please see photos below). As you approach the YHA entrance, a shallow gully is starting to form in the centre of the path where surface water is running from the southern edge. There is sufficient width for the public to use at present yet the gullies at the side and centre of the track are likely to worsen as time goes on.

Water management is key to the longevity of most path surfaces and it is evident here that drainage measures are required to prevent deterioration. Grips and/or humps installed at regular intervals should address this. Some re-profiling and potentially importing some stone would help to restore the original surface levels.



Current Condition: Section C

Pooling surface water is the main issue here (please see photos below) and is worse in winter. There is sufficient width for public use. The large tyre marks on the edge of the path would suggest that this section is used by large agricultural vehicles.

From the photos below one can see that the path verge is higher than the path surface and is preventing the water from draining away. A quick –fix solution here would be to scrape away the soft mud into the verge (on the southern side), creating drainage grips at regular intervals. Once the surface water has drained away, it will be easier to see how deep the puddles are and whether any infill is required. Apart from the surface water, this section is in good condition.



Current Condition: Section D

Surface water erosion has carved a gully down the southern side of the track and is starting to drift across the path at several points (see photos below). There is sufficient width for public use at present, yet the gully is likely to worsen and may start to drift further across the path. There are large tyre marks within the gully, which suggests that large farm machinery also use the track. If the gully is regularly driven in, it will deteriorate quickly, making the chalk looser and easier for the water to wash it away.

Water management is key here which is more difficult when the track is sunken and lies below the verge or has banks on either side. It would require a huge volume of material (chalk) to build up the levels to make the path surface higher than the banks to facilitate drainage. It would be far simpler to re-grade the path giving it a sufficient cross-fall and to build humps to direct water off the path towards the verge. The verge/banks would need to be dug into to allow water to flow away from the path surface.

This section, out of the four, is of the highest priority to address in terms of improving public access.



Conclusions and Actions

From a public access perspective, the surface conditions of Sections A, B, and C are currently suitable for the intended public use. Section D will require some remedial work soon to prevent further deterioration.

I can see that the surface condition of all four sections may not be agreeable for private access depending on individual circumstances. As National Trail managers, we have to prioritise the needs of the public to access and use the public rights of way that form the South Downs Way.

Our programme of surface repair work for next financial year (2022/23) has been prioritised and agreed. We recognise that Section D does require attention and therefore we have included this in the following year's work programme (2023/24). The list is subject to change depending on any unforeseen urgent work arising (e.g. landslips and coastal erosion).

The Trail surface is regularly monitored, assessed and sections prioritised for repair where necessary.

We would be very happy to work with the residents and land managers at Truleigh Hill to help address the surface issues noted above by providing advice and technical expertise.

Suggested surface material options for South Downs Way repairs

Below are some examples of surfacing materials and techniques that have been used by the South Downs National Park Authority to repair sections of the South Downs Way National Trail.

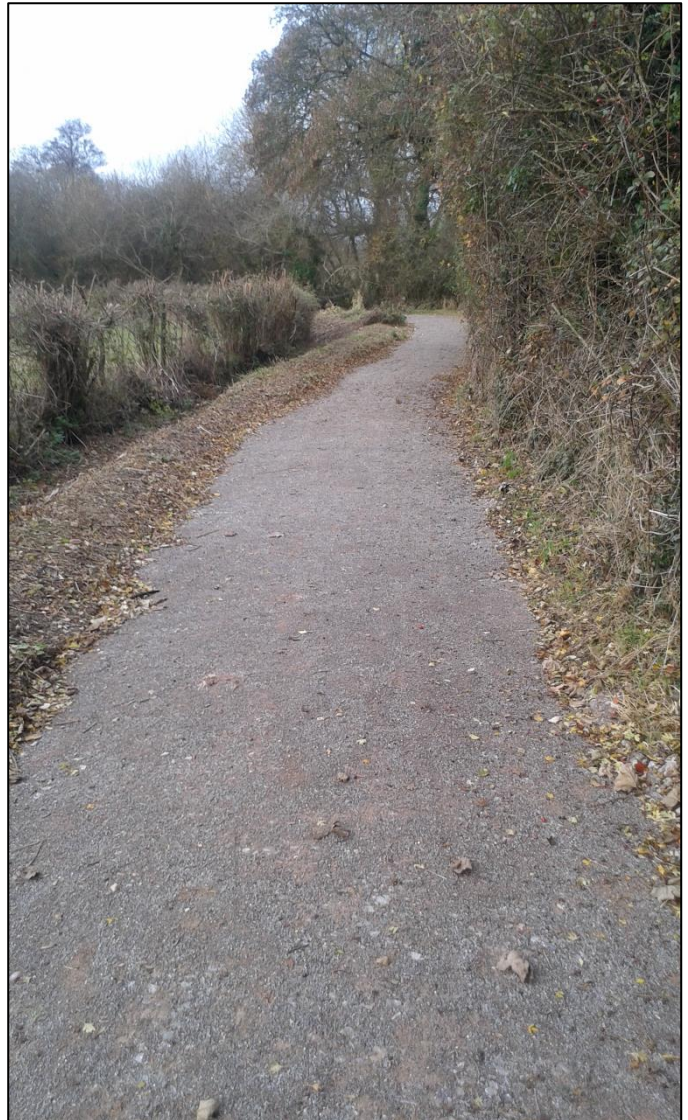
Cobbled Chalk and Flint Mix

For exposed downland locations, surface repairs should be as landscape-sensitive as possible. Using local materials that blend into the existing surroundings is preferable and retains landscape character. Cobbled chalk is a cheaper material to build up low points and the mixture of crushed and/or whole field flints in the upper profile of the surface provides grip and durability. Please see photos below.



Crushed Limestone

In locations that are less sensitive and receive higher levels of traffic (public and private use), crushed limestone (Type 1 MOT) provides a suitable surface and retains a rural character. Limestone can come in many different colours, from dark grey to pink to sandy yellow, and therefore it might be worth considering what would look best at a particular location. This is dependent on the supplier and the initial colour will mellow over time. It is also worth finishing the surface with a thin layer of limestone dust to infill any small voids and to provide a smoother finish. Please see photos below of some examples of a limestone paths.



Track Stabilisation

For steep sections of path that are prone to erosion by surface water run-off and/or used by heavy machinery and vehicle use, we would suggest considering track stabilisation. Track stabilisation uses specialist machinery to rip up the existing surface and then mixes it with cement dust and water to provide a sealed surface that retains the character of a rural track. The finished surface sets like concrete making it durable and long lasting. This option is more expensive and needs to be planned, as there are not many companies that specialise in this technique. This can be the most cost-effective solution to tracks that traditionally require regular maintenance. Below are some examples of paths that have been stabilised.



Source: Re-Drive Stabilisation Ltd (<http://www.re-drive.co.uk/>)