

1 Walking the Edge

by Virginia Willcocks

Approximate distance: 3.5 miles (5.6 km)
Estimated time: 1.5 - 2.0 hours

This delightful footpath walk around the edge of the village of Barrow upon Soar mainly follows recognised footpaths, with excellent views of the River Soar, the Midland railway, and the Millennium Park sundial. You will see a new woodland tract and experience an area known to locals as "mud alley". Suitable footwear is essential, i.e. walking boots or wellingtons, as it can be wet in parts and, in one place, **pretty muddy!!!**

You will find ample free parking in the village car park, at the corner of High Street and Cotes Road, adjacent to the Three Crowns Inn **P**

From the car park walk along Cotes Road, on the right hand pavement, past Humphrey Perkins School. Continue, passing Strancliffe Hall on your right, (often obscured by abundant foliage). At the end of the grounds, turn right into the bridle path called Strancliffe Lane, **1** the end of which can become very muddy, (mud alley) and through the housing estate to Nottingham Road. During construction of this estate there were some interesting excavations of old lime workings including a number of lime kilns.

2 Turn right on to Nottingham Road and cross the road where you should take extra care as you will walk on the grass verge for 500 yards. Follow the road towards the village. You will see a 'Public Bridleway' sign **3** on the left hand side of the road directing you through the allotments (Parson's Close). Go through the gate at the end of this footpath and enter a field. Turn right and follow the hedge; crossing over the brook to the lane where you turn right. At the end of this lane is the entrance to the Millennium Park **4** Enter the Park and follow either pathway.

The first feature to catch your eye will be the exciting Thrush's Eggs sculpture. Walk on to reach the Millennium Sundial. The gnomon, 6.75m high, is one of the tallest in the whole country. From this vantage point there are excellent views of well-known beauty spots.... Bradgate Park and Beacon Hill.

Continue along the path to Melton Road **5**

(Note: Here you have a choice.... if the weather is very wet and the terrain sticky, you may follow the shortened route instructions at the end of this document thus avoiding some pretty muddy fields, otherwise continue to follow the directions below.)

Bear left, cross the road and pass through the gate on to the signed bridleway by a newly wooded area to the left. Continue to way marker at end of path, turn right **6** and then left down to the railway line. Cross the line here, following all the necessary safety guidelines, looking and listening carefully, and crossing as quickly as you can. On the other side of the line walk down the "Pingle" footpath to arrive, after about 50 yards, at Sileby Road.

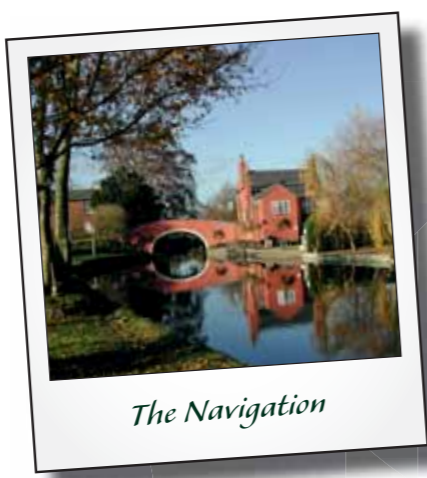
Turn right. Walk along the road for about a quarter of a mile to the bottom of the hill, where, at the end of a row of terraced cottages, you will see a Jitty between 26 & 28 Sileby Road, leading to Avon Road and the river.

(Alternative route and original route rejoin at this point) 7

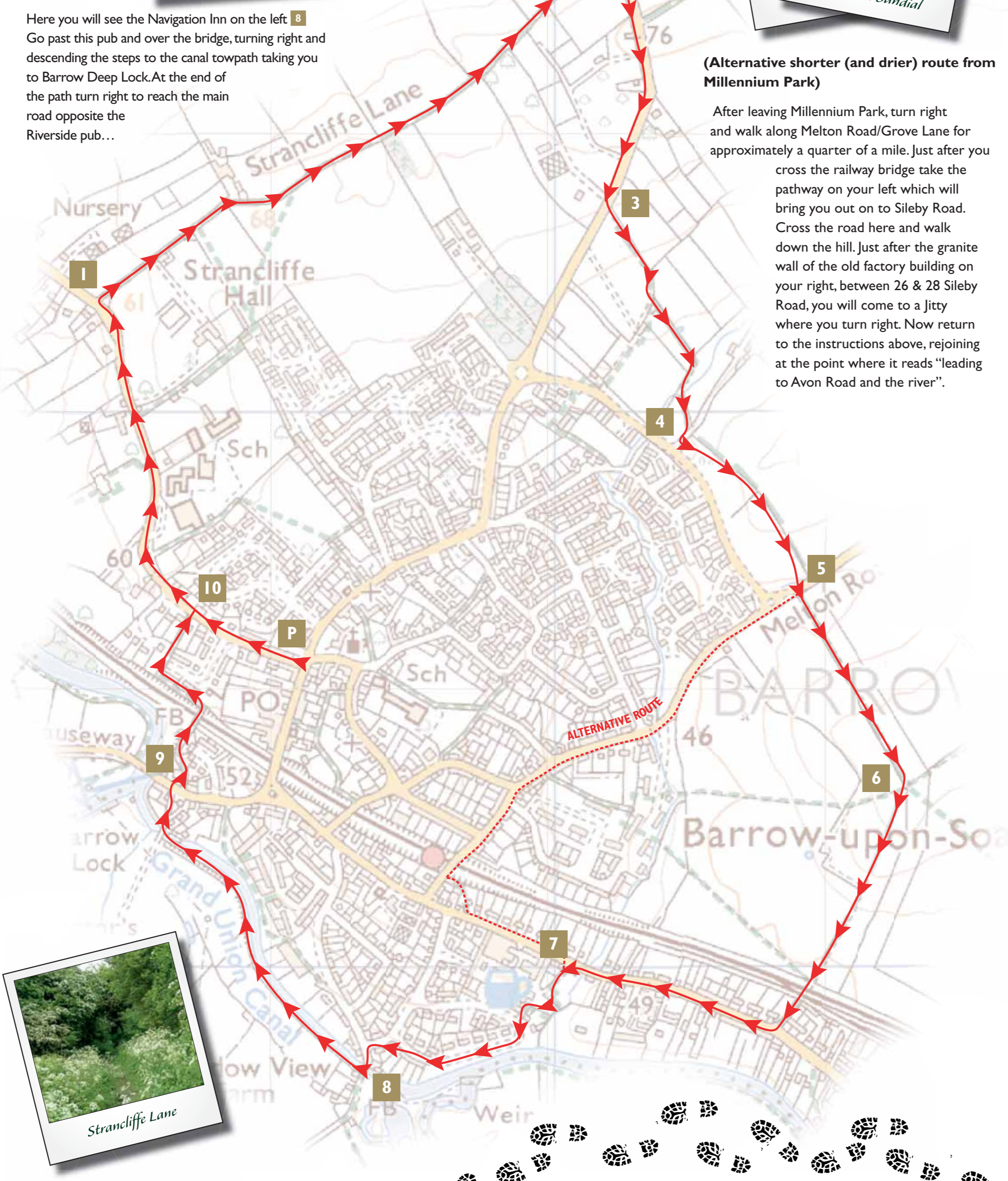
At the river, turn right, continue along Welland Road keeping the river on your left.

At Ribble Drive, turn left and, at the junction with Mill Lane, turn left again.

Here you will see the Navigation Inn on the left **8** Go past this pub and over the bridge, turning right and descending the steps to the canal towpath taking you to Barrow Deep Lock. At the end of the path turn right to reach the main road opposite the Riverside pub...



...cross the road and, on the right of the pub, take the steep path - Cliffe Hill **9**, which leads to the railway bridge. Cross the bridge, following the footpath until it emerges on Cotes Road **10** Turn right and after a few yards you return to your starting point at the Three Crowns car park.



(Alternative shorter (and drier) route from Millennium Park)

After leaving Millennium Park, turn right and walk along Melton Road/Grove Lane for approximately a quarter of a mile. Just after you cross the railway bridge take the pathway on your left which will bring you out on to Sileby Road. Cross the road here and walk down the hill. Just after the granite wall of the old factory building on your right, between 26 & 28 Sileby Road, you will come to a Jitty where you turn right. Now return to the instructions above, rejoining at the point where it reads "leading to Avon Road and the river".

Strancliffe Lane is a bridleway between Cotes Road and Nottingham Road. A 'bridleway' is a path for horse riders. Most bridleways were created centuries ago and, though we do not have a date for Strancliffe Lane, it is probably very old. It is an example of a useful, ancient route which, for some reason, never got upgraded into a regular road as we know them today. The countryside is criss-crossed by bridleways showing the importance of horses as a means of transport before the widespread use of motorcars.

Strancliffe Lane is a little unusual in that, in several places, the lane is lower than the surrounding fields. This is because it goes through what were once limestone quarries ("delphs"). There is an especially big dip just after the junction with Willow Road and before the path on the right past the Orchard Kennels. Why should a public right of way go through a quarry? Was it diverted while the quarrying was taking place or was it made only after the quarry was finished?

The Millennium Park was created as a lasting reminder of the Year 2000 celebrations. The centrepiece is the Millennium Sundial. Officially opened in 2004, it has a 6.75m stainless steel 'gnomon' - one of the biggest in the country - set in a 'chapter ring' of 16 hour-marking granite blocks. It makes much use of local materials in its structure and landscaping.

Sundials indicate time by the position of the gnomon's shadow. The gnomon has to be set parallel to the Earth's axis to cast a shadow in the same direction at the same time every day of the year. Hence, a sundial has to be calibrated precisely to take account of its location on the surface of the Earth. Patrick Powers, a specialist designer of sundials, was commissioned to do the necessary calculations for Barrow. (for more information, see the British Sundial Society's website www.sundialsoc.org.uk.)

Sundials show the time by the Sun but - because the Earth does not travel in a strict circle around the Sun (its path is an ellipse), the Earth's axis is tilted relative to the Sun, and the sundial may not be on the Meridian line of longitude used as the time base - the time shown by the shadow is usually not the same as that shown by a clock. [Clocks show an average or 'mean' time for the country as a whole. For the UK this is 'Greenwich Mean Time' or GMT. Sundials show what is called 'Local Apparent Time' or LAT. LAT is very specific to a place.] The combined effect of these differences is that the sundial can appear about 15 mins fast or slow relative to GMT depending on the time of year. A plaque beside the sundial shows the corrections to make.

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WALKS
 BUSCA
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Guided Walks

- 1 Walking the Edge
- 2 Walking the Jitties

These two walks show you where to find the many jitties in the village and take you around the perimeter lanes and fields. The jitties are, mainly, pushchair and wheelchair friendly: the perimeter walk is not and will require suitable footwear

WALKS

2 Walking the Jitties

by Arthur Gardner and Michael Gilbert

This document concentrates solely on the jitties of Barrow. "Jitties" is the old term for little pedestrian footpaths running between roads, designated for foot traffic. Known as "alleys", "jetties", "ginnels", or "cuttings" in some places, in this part of Leicestershire they are generally known as "jitties".

Barrow upon Soar is criss-crossed with jitties. Some are easy to find: others are more difficult to spot. This guide is to show you where to find most of them. They are Rights of Way, so you are not trespassing. They add variety to village walks and reveal alternative views of the village. The street names are shown on the "A-Z of Streets" available from the Parish Council Offices, the Library, the Paper Shop and other outlets.

1 Buttermere Way to Strancliffe Lane

This leads between the back of Strancliffe Hall and the new estate off Willow Road. Eventually, more jitties will be added.

Strancliffe Lane is a bridleway from Cotes Road to Nottingham Road. Towards Nottingham Road it becomes very wet in bad weather – hence the local name of "mud alley".

2 Buttermere Way to Cotes Road

This goes between Strancliffe Hall and Humphrey Perkins School exiting on to Cotes Road opposite Northfields House.

(It is narrow and not suitable for wheelchairs or pushchairs).

3 Cotes Road to King George's Field (recreation ground)

At the front of Humphrey Perkins School, you will see an offshoot of Cotes Road going to the right of the Community Centre. Follow this into King George's Field (a.k.a. King George V's field). The path through the playing field is clearly marked by slabs. There are 4 exits:

- 3a: into Beaumont Road (between nos. 76 and 78);
- 3b: into Wycliffe Ave (see the commemorative plaques on the uprights of the gate);
- 3c: in the corner near the swings, goes into Thirlmere Road (beside no. 13);
- 3d: into Salters Lane (see below).

4 Salters Lane

This goes from North Street (opposite the Methodist Church) into King George's Field recreation ground.

Local lore holds that it's called "Salters" in memory of the very ancient "Salt Way" that came over the Wolds into Barrow somewhere near Paudy Lane/Melton Road).

5 Grasmere Close to North Street

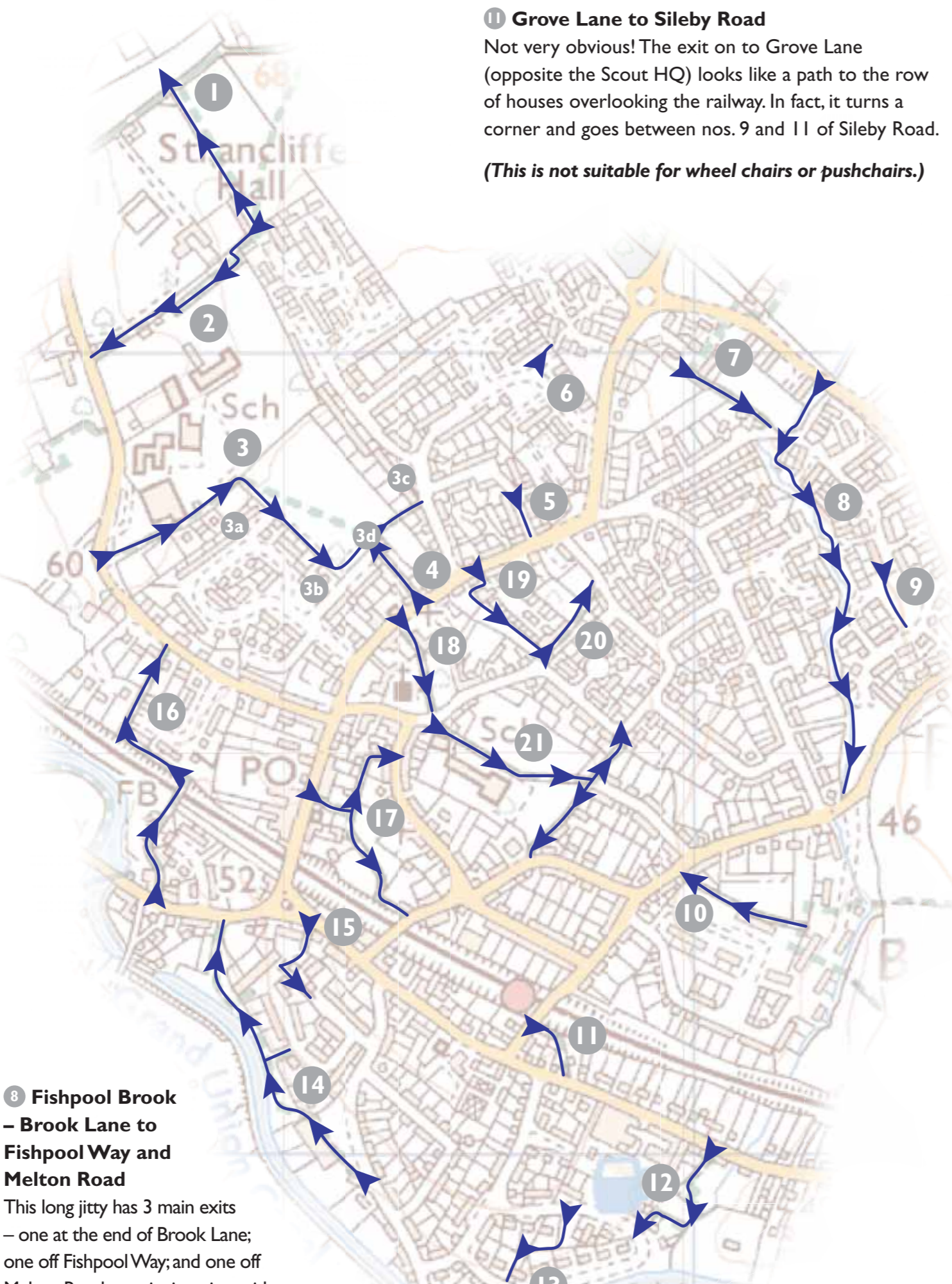
A shortcut from North Street into the 'Lakes' Estate.

6 Ennerdale Road to Birch Avenue

From the end of the Ennerdale Road cul-de-sac (beside no. 33) to 15 Birch Avenue.

7 Nursery Grove to Brook Lane

From Nursery Grove (off Fishpool Way), beside no. 14 to the end of Brook Lane - **often muddy**.



8 Fishpool Brook – Brook Lane to Fishpool Way and Melton Road

This long jitty has 3 main exits – one at the end of Brook Lane; one off Fishpool Way; and one off Melton Road near its junction with Breachfield Road/Babington Road. It follows Fishpool Brook for most of its way with side access going into Newton Close, Heron Road and Swan Close.

The brook is usually dry in summer with what little water it carries being underground along this stretch (probably because its bed, at this point, is porous limestone).

9 Mallard Road to Branston Avenue

A path across a green space in the middle of the estate. A side path leads to the Fishpool Brook (see 8).

The jitty runs alongside the remains of a limestone quarry (known locally as a "delph" from the old word "delve" meaning to dig or quarry).

10 Breachfield Road to Melton Road

Running between nos. 59 and 61 Breachfield Road, past a side path into Condon Road, across Wheatley Close, and on to Melton Road, where it is signposted to "Seagrave" and "Gypsy Lane". Gypsy Lane is a field lane near "Quorn Park" which was the base for the Quorn Hunt after it left Quorn and before it moved to Kirby Bellars).

11 Grove Lane to Sibley Road

Not very obvious! The exit on to Grove Lane (opposite the Scout HQ) looks like a path to the row of houses overlooking the railway. In fact, it turns a corner and goes between nos. 9 and 11 of Sibley Road.

(This is not suitable for wheel chairs or pushchairs.)

12 Sibley Road to Avon Road

The jitty runs between nos. 26 and 28 Sibley Road to between nos. 37 and 39 Avon Road.

It goes round the back of what was Driver's hosiery factory. The plot is still an industrial estate. Just before Avon Road it runs beside the Fishpool Brook near its junction with the River Soar.

13 Avon Road to Welland Road

Beside no. 22 Avon Road there is a small green which the jitty circuits before going into a passage emerging between nos. 9 and 11 Welland Road.



Old Catholic Church, Hollybush Lane

14 Pig's Close – Mill Lane to Bridge Street

From no. 52 Mill Lane, past the playground and along the canal to Bridge Street (between Cliffe House and no. 7 Piets Close Cottage. The area is thought to be named after a family who owned a small field (a "close" as in "enclosure"). Alternative sources give it as "Pigs Close" or "Piet's Close". There is a side branch halfway along going up to between nos. 22 and 24 Holbourne Close.

15 South Street to Holbourne Close and Cramps Close

Near the Jerusalem roundabout, beside no. 2 South Street, is a short jitty into Holbourne Close. Beside no. 23 Holbourne Close is a jitty into the end of Cramps Close.

16 Barrowcliffe Jitty

At the bottom of Bridge Street, behind the Riverside pub, is a long jitty that rises steeply up to the footbridge over the railway. (It is not suitable for wheelchairs as it is so steep.)

The footbridge used to give access to trains at the original station. It overlooks Crossley Close, which was then the marshalling yard and coal depot.

The jitty continues between Barrowcliffe and The Rookery to Cotes Road between nos. 29 and 31.

17 Shooting Close Lane.

Halfway up the High Street, opposite the pharmacy, is a jitty which splits into two – to the right along Shooting Close Lane to Melton Road near the railway bridge; and to the left along Little Lane to its exit beside no. 4A Beveridge Street.

Shooting Close Lane is possibly a reference to a field where people practised shooting.

18 Church Lane.

This jitty is a shortcut, past the back of the Parish Church, between Church Street and the Hammer and Pincers pub in North Street.

19 Grays Court.

The jitty runs around the side of Grays Court sheltered housing, in a twisty route, to Church Street and Hollybush Lane (where it is signposted "to Bryans Close").

20 Hollybush Lane – Church Street to Breadcroft Lane

At the corner of Church Street, where it turns into Highfields, is the jitty known for years as "Hollybush Lane" but now signposted as "The Hollybush".

The house just in the jitty, by the turning to Grays Court/Bryan Close, used to be the Catholic Church. You can still see the Church Bell.

21 Hall Orchard to New Street, Highfields and Melton Road

This complex of jitties runs down from the Primary School to New Street where it splits into two - one going right to Melton Road alongside the school playground, the other left to the junction of Highfields and Breadcroft Lane.

A flour mill stood on the site now used by Barrow Boating in 1086 – as recorded in the 'Domesday Book' tax census for William the Conqueror - which means that it was built before then. It is an obvious place for a water mill since the natural fall in the level of land provides a good 'head' of water to drive a water wheel. Flourmills were an essential resource for the community as they would have grown and milled their own cereals for food. Mills were usually owned by the Lord of the Manor or the Church and fees were charged for its use. Mills were a valuable piece of property.

The last mill was demolished in 1938 as local milling became uneconomic. The decline started much earlier. In the late 1880s the mill was converted to grind gypsum shipped in by barge (this is well before British Gypsum dug the mine between Barrow and Sibley). There is a possibility that it might have been used, too, to grind limestone but this is not yet confirmed. The mill 'races' which channelled water past the undershot wheels can still be seen. When it closed, the mill had two wheels: one 20 feet in diameter and one 15 feet.

The imposing Georgian house beside the canal bridge was built for a former mill owner. The row of cottages beside it were for the mill workers.

The canal was built in 1794 as the 'Leicester Navigation' to bring coal from the Derbyshire coalfields to Leicester. Eventually, the local canals were joined up with canals south of Leicester to form the 'Grand Union Canal' giving a continuous route from the Thames to the Trent. What a confident name!

Canals were called 'navigations' to highlight the fact that they were deep enough to carry boats (mainly shallow draft barges). Many rivers – like the Soar – were too shallow, in places, to take barges. The men who dug the canals were called "Navy men" or 'Navvies'. They were specialist labourers who travelled around the country to wherever the canals were being built rather as road builders do today.

'The Navigation' pub stands, appropriately, on the 'navigation'. Note the use of neatly cut Welsh slate for its roof. Welsh slate was more expensive than the local Swithland slate until about 1840 when a tax on Welsh slate was abolished and the railway opened to provide easier transport over large distances. Welsh slate became very popular. It was lighter and easier to use than the rougher Swithland slate. By the end of the 1800s all the Swithland quarries had closed.

The beer for 'The Navigation', incidentally, was originally supplied by Sharpe's brewery in Sibley. There is no record of a brewery in Barrow.



Canal near Soar Bridge

The first railway was built in 1840 to carry coal from the Derbyshire coalfields in direct competition with the canal. It was so much more efficient that it virtually put the canal out of business overnight. The goods yard stood on what is now Crossley Close. The railway was widened to 4 lines in 1868 to give a separate pair of lines for passenger services. John Sydney Crossley, engineer to the Midland Railway Co. and maker of the famous Settle to Carlisle railway, made the extensions at Barrow. His house, in what is now Holbourne Close, has been demolished. His brother's house, 'The Mount', still stands in the High St. The station was called "Barrow on Soar and Quorn". It closed in 1968.

The Rev Humphrey Perkins, a former resident of the Parish, left money in his Will (1717) to start a 'grammar' school for poor boys of Barrow. A 'grammar' school was, then, a school which taught academic subjects like grammar and arithmetic. The first school was near Holy Trinity church (in what is now the Conservative Club). It moved to the Cotes Rd site in 1902 with 32 boys and 1 girl. Nearer the village was the Old Board School opened in 1880 and closed in 1981. 'Board' schools were run by local School Boards and subsidised by local government rates. They were for younger children and greatly extended the range of schooling available to the general population.



4A Beveridge St entry to Little Lane