

Queen Camel Parish: a survey on the condition of the Rights of Way north of the A303

Boundary Description

The parish boundaries are delineated on the north by the unnamed minor road that runs in a south easterly direction from Bab Cary, past Camel Leas and Forty Acres Farm, to the junction with footpath WN23/40 and past Hazelgrove Cottages. Soon after, there is a near right-angle junction with footpath WN23/38, which takes the boundary south-westwards; coinciding with the boundary of the grounds of Hazelgrove School; with Sparkford Hall immediately to the east. The boundary is effectively the footpath, which extends for about half a mile and as far as the access road to Hazelgrove School. The path beyond this point (about ¼ mile) has now been swallowed up by the extensive construction works for the A303. Originally it was possible to cross the A303 to follow a continuation of the path into Ridge Copse and on through Camel Hill Woods to enter Gason Lane. Additionally, there is a short spur (WN27/16) that leaves the boundary footpath at Jubilee Wood, to cross the A303 to Sparkford. This also, is now impassable.

We pick up the boundary again on the western side of the 'north' parish, at Canegore Corner, to follow field hedges boundaries close to Steart Hill/Steart Lane nearly as far as Woodlands Farm, where the boundary turns north-eastwards and becomes more convoluted; executing several sharp turns as it follows field boundaries to eventually meet RoW L2/27 that soon after joins the minor road to Bab Cary and completes the circuit.

Distribution of the Rights of Way

A field boundary line east of Steart Hill Rd. and the unnamed track from Bab Cary, form most of the western and north/north-eastern boundaries respectively of the segment of Queen Camel parish lying north of the A303 with the A303 itself, of course, constituting the southern boundary. As previously stated, footpaths WN23/38; WN23/12 forms the eastern/south-eastern boundary. Within these boundaries lie the following paths.

Running roughly north to south (and reading from west to east) are three footpaths or tracks; L2/27 (0.18 mile); WN23/34 (0.45 mile) and the much longer WN23/33 (1.5 miles), with its branch off to the A303 past Vale Hill Farm to the A303: WN23/37/WN23/32; (0.47 mile)

Excluding metalled road and tracks, the total length of RoW in the north of the parish is approximately 4.5 miles

Access

With the A303 in the process of being dualled on its way through the parish, it will soon not be possible to directly access those footpaths to the north on footpaths and it will necessitate a long detour of nearly two miles through Sparkford to access the eastern footpaths. Realistically, anyone wishing to walk the RoW will need to drive to either to South Barrow or Bab Cary, and commence their walk from there.

Walking the Rights of Way

I have identified three routes which incorporate most of the RoW within the 'north' parish.

1/ The path that commences at the eastern end of the Bab Cary road and that continues on to join Sparkford Road. It passes through a metal wicket farm gate (ST599274) and shortly afterwards, a wooden kissing gate; both of which are in good repair, The path continues into the grounds of Hazel Grove, where it hugs the parish boundary. There is a wooden stile with a rather narrow tread at the corner (ST602269) where the RoW WN23/38 turns south-westwards, and a north-eastwards continuation of that RoW: WN25/14, carries on into South Barrow parish, but I'm not sure whose parish this stile falls into. Thereafter, as the RoW continues in a south-westerly direction as far as the roadworks for the new road extension close to the Sparkford roundabout, there are no further

stiles or gates. Total: 0.85 mile

2/ A route that runs laterally; east-west, across the south of the 'north parish'. We accessed this from the top of Gason Lane; still possible at present, but I'm not sure for how much longer. There is a metalled road as far as Camel Hill House and then continuing as a RoW track **WN23/32** to a point just shy of Vale Farm, where the RoW enter the field and becomes a path via a sound, wooden gate (**ST583259**)

After Vale Farm, this footpath, crosses over a hedge ditch via double gate/plank; both in good condition (**ST577260**) to exit the parish as RoW **Y27/19**. (0.75 mile)

3/ Walking from South Barrow via Nightingale Lane; a distance of just over a mile, the footpath **WN23/33** leaves the Babcary road via a greasy plank-bridge and an overgrown stile (**ST586277**). However, there is a substantial gap in the adjoining hedge alongside a finger-post which facilitates access. We followed this path almost due south for a distance of approximately 1.4 miles. En route, we crossed several stiles and bridges:

ST585269: a wide cobbled bridge over a drainage ditch in good condition

ST585267: a somewhat greasy plank-bridge followed by a newish, metal gate

ST586264: a new wooden gate

ST586262: a metal, wicket gate in good condition

ST587260: a new metal wicket gate where the path crosses the farm track to the nearby barn

ST587259: a metal gate followed by a wooden bridge; both in good condition

The path then veers slightly to the south-east and starts to climb towards Camel Hill Farm.

There is one final, rather delapidated wooden gate followed by a newish metal gate (**ST589258**). Further onward progress past Camel Hill to the A303 is blocked by the construction works for the new road.

Our return route saw us retracing our steps as far as **ST585269**, where **WN23/34** heads off westwards; becoming RoW **WN23/35** after a distance of a ¼ of a mile or so. **WN23/34** then turns north to meet the Babcary road at **ST581277**, where there is no gate but open access to the road, with a finger-post adjoining.

Meanwhile, we continued to follow **WN23/35** as it followed the parish boundary north-eastwards, There is a wooden stile in good condition (**ST577274**) where the path **L2/26** exits the parish, and soon after, **WN23/35** itself ceases as the path leaves the parish and becomes **L2/27** in Babcary parish. .

Summary

By and large, the essential RoW infrastructures for those routes north of A303: stiles; gates, bridges and finger-posts, are extant and in good condition. Nowhere is the path obstructed or impassable. However, there is a noticeable absence of waymarks, except for a cluster at the southern end of **WN23/33**, approaching Camel Hill House and only two or three finger-posts in total en-route.

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