

A new footbridge and boardwalk has recently been installed in Ansty to allow full access once more across a field stream and marshland area along what was once a popular walk in the parish for local people as well as visitors

How did we get there?



Newly constructed Footbridge, Footpath 8, Ansty. August 21st 2018

One autumn day about four or five years ago, our current parish council footpath officer (new to this voluntary role) came across a rather despondent elderly lady, long time Ansty resident, Aileen Fisher-Rowe who was walking south west along Kings Lane with her dog in tow.

Now everybody in Ansty knew Aileen, by now in her early 90s. She was a much loved proper countrywoman of great standing and for years she had walked most, if not all, Ansty's fine rural footpaths, most recently with her lurcher Zephyr. She had an immense knowledge of all country matters and could recount in great detail the aeons of history and geography that make up the very DNA 'essence' of Ansty parish. Indeed for decades she actively played a prominent part in the life, times and government of the village.

As she became older and frailer she doggedly confined her walking to the local paths near her cottage, one of which linked Ansty Coombe Lane just above Hillside with Kings Lane.

On this particular damp autumn day Aileen attempted to walk one of the older rural footpaths in Ansty which links Ansty Coombe Lane with Kings Lane. Walking from the Hillside end towards Kings Lane, Aileen had descended a green field, over a field stile and came to the stream that flowed through a shallow valley on its way from the Coombe above to join the larger stream that wends its way northwards through Ansty, on its way to Tisbury and the River Nadder.

Now before WW2 this once free running stream was tended by the various tenants of the estate (when agricultural labour was plentiful) and it was largely kept clear of debris and weed in order to help maintain the surrounding meadows for good quality grazing. Where the old footpath crossed the stream there were stepping stones.

Since then and for various reasons, decades of haphazard grazing regimes, poor land husbandry, broken culverts and a general lack of

maintenance, meant the stream became silted up. Add to this a run of wet, mild years in the last decade there was a rise in the water table. During the last couple of decades the stepping stones slowly disappeared and a wider area became a marshy bog – making access very difficult, if not impossible, especially during winter months.

This brings us back to this autumn day where Aileen had then attempted to cross this boggy morass to get to the other side and ascend the footpath to Kings Lane. Unfortunately, she slipped off a tuft of marsh grass and half fell in the shallow stream, becoming stuck in oozing silty clay. She eventually managed to extricate herself from this predicament, composed herself, and then managed to reach the gate at the top of the field on Kings Lane (which was fortunately open – at the time the stile was hidden in an overgrown hedge!)

By chance she met the new parish footpath officer also out on a walk. In a typical understated way Aileen related what had happened to her and wondered if anything could be done about it. She was promised that something could and would be done about it and that this noble little footpath with a long pedigree will once again become fully accessible to all.

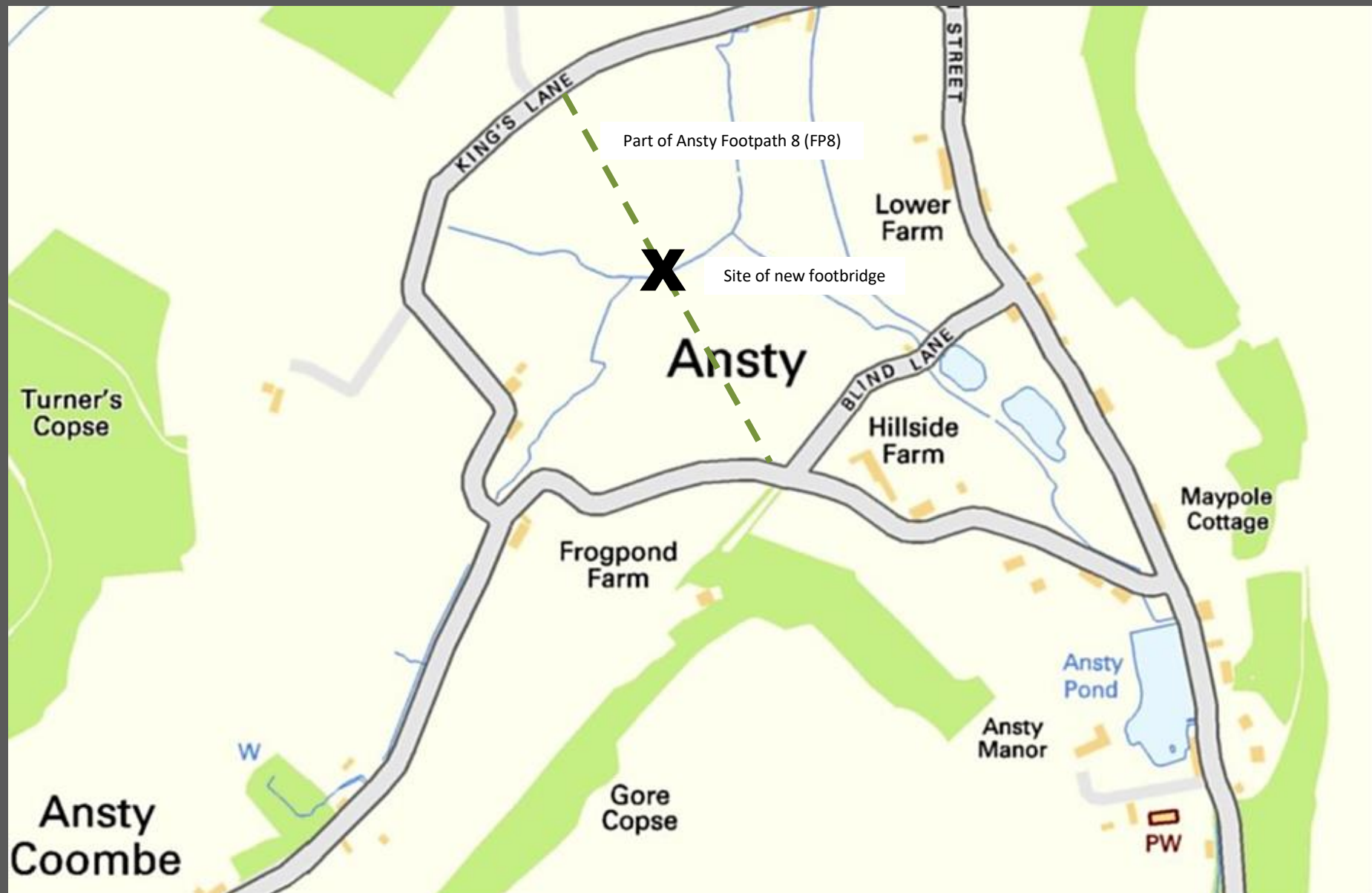
Sadly, Aileen died in January this year, too late to see the new stout wooden footbridge and board walk that now crosses the 'stream' and its boggy hinterland. This project was a successful joint operation between Wiltshire Council, the South Wiltshire Ramblers, Jaki Farrell and her excellent Seeds4Success young people group, the Ansty Footpath Maintenance Group (all volunteers), Wiltshire Council and a helpful tenant Farmer.

Aileen wasn't one for personal fuss or grand ceremony but she would have been delighted to see that her unfortunate stumble and her wish that something might be done to improve access on this footpath eventually came to fruition.


So, here's celebrating 'Aileen's Bridge!'




All pictures taken on August 21st 2018




This map shows the location of the new footbridge in Ansty which was constructed and completed in three phases by various groups on 16th, 20th, and 21st August



Clearing the access and sinking supports for the 'sleeper' boardwalk



Youngsters (and one oldie) digging out the weed and silt from the stream area to enable the path line to be established




Jaki Farrell (Project Leader of 'Seeds4Success' Youth Group) and Alex Howson (Wiltshire Officer) working with the young people. The youngsters were simply brilliant!

The new Footbridge was constructed in 3 stages.


Phase 1: One day spent lifting all the bridge materials over a stile (some very heavy items) and then constructing a 'sleeper' boardwalk access ramp by the '[Seeds4Success Youth Group](#)' based in Mere (all pictured on this page).

Phase 2: The Footbridge was constructed in a day by the [South Wiltshire Ramblers Heavy Gang](#) (including our own [Ansty Footpath Maintenance Group](#)) under the direction of [Wiltshire Council](#) officers Nick Cowen, Alex Howson and Derek Newland. Wiltshire Council kindly supplied the materials. Click on the links at the foot of these pages to see the Heavy Gang at work in Ansty.

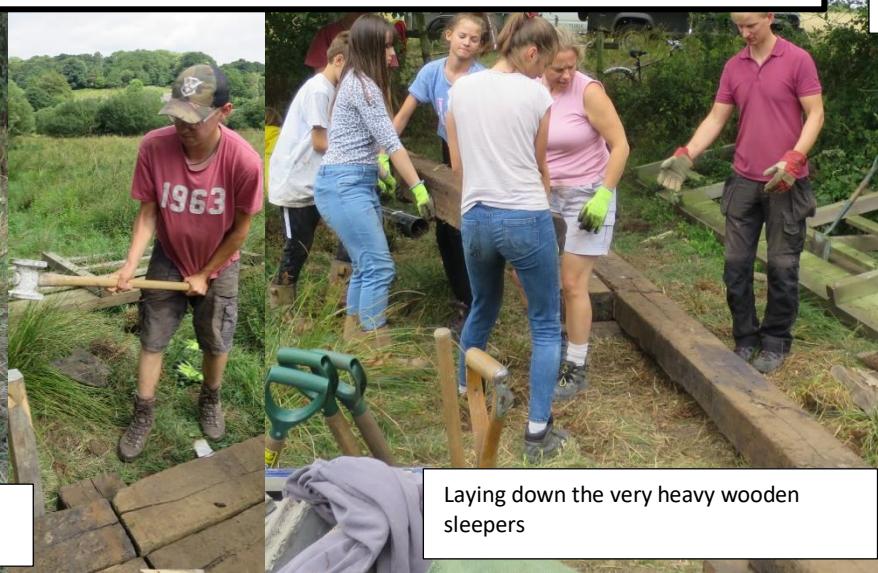
Phase 3: The 'Seeds4Success Group' constructed a second sleeper boardwalk on another day to allow access to the bridge from both sides and then tidied up the site before leaving. Without this valuable input from these skilled and enthusiastic young people the project would have taken much longer.




Making sure the sleeper supports are level



Sawing points on chestnut spars to knock them into the ground to retain the boardwalk (right)



Laying down the very heavy wooden sleepers



Laying the chicken wire tight and tacking in to ensure a non-slip surface

Ansty Parish Council would like to thank:

The Wiltshire Council 'Rights of Way team' - Nick Cowen, Senior Footpath Officer, Alex Howson, (footpath officer) and Derek Newland (contractor) for supplying their labour, all the materials, tools and technical 'know how' and their support in seeing this project through.

The excellent South Wiltshire Ramblers (Volunteers) under the stewardship of Norman Martin and Graham Read for supplying the manpower, technical skills , even more tools and the constructing of the bridge itself! 'A fantastic day's work!'

The brilliant 'Seeds4Success ' Young Persons Organisation' based in nearby Mere together with their project leader Jaki Farrell. They constructed the two boardwalks either side of the footbridge. Thanks to you, Jaki and your enthusiastic youngsters who all worked tirelessly and as a team. You really deserve 'credits' all round!

And lastly, thanks to the Ansty Footpath Maintenance crew! They showed up too!

We all hope that Ansty parishioners and indeed all walkers, will once again enjoy unfettered access across this lovely rolling landscape.

Further Links:

[The SW Wiltshire HG at work in Ansty](#)

[Seeds4Success project work in Ansty](#)