

Zig Zag lane – Dalwood

Devon has the most extensive road network in the country. We have 8,000 miles of tarmac'd roads and 3,108 miles of public rights of way. Potholes, grass growing down the middle of lanes and general degradation all add to the 'character' of our highways and byways. The battle against climate change and the power of water means their upkeep is expensive. The current Highways budget for Devon is around £28 million; but the council estimate it needs £167 million to repair our road network. We have over 1000 'unsealed' unclassified county roads (UCRs), 365 miles in total across Devon and 54 miles of Byways Open to All Traffic (BOATS). So, in all there are about just over 400 miles of non tarmac'd lanes in Devon open for anyone with an appropriate form of transport to enjoy and which need maintenance, just like tarmac roads to keep them open and passable.

Across the 5 decades of TRF history, the Devon group has an established reputation as a conservation based organisation, who as well as riding the old green roads, work with stakeholders to conserve historic rights of way. Climate change is the greatest threat to our right of way heritage; whether from water erosion, storm damage from trees being blown over or simply lanes overgrown by briar and bramble. More frequent high intensity rainfall is causing significant damage to steeper, softer rock lanes and so in Devon the TRF has been active supporting landowners, Public Rights of Way and Parish Councils ensuring a collaborative approach to keeping ancient, unsealed rights of way open for all users.

In Devon, we have our own 'Strata Florida', but in miniature. It's not miles long, rising up over a Welsh mountainside, but only a few hundred metres long, nestling deep in the verdant valleys of east Devon. However, this old UCR crosses a stream over a dozen times, like Strata Florida and was particularly technical. Ham Lane or 'zig zags', as the locals call it, is a County Road that runs besides a tributary of Corry Brook from Ham to Lower Corry. With alternative tarmac'd roads available I assume the road became disused over time. The hazel and holly have grown out of the hedges and the stream has nibbled away at its banks. I've only ever ridden it once, squeezing the bike round and between trees and more challengingly, crossing the stream over a dozen times on rickety old sleepers, more old skool Camel Trophy than trail riding. It was a real challenge for all users.

Devon TRF, led mostly by Ian 'Wacky' Collins, ably assisted by his dad 'Pops', have worked tirelessly with the local council and landowners to repair numerous lanes throughout Devon, including 'Dumpy Bag' lane near Tipton St John, Ashwell Bridge near Halbertonford and Blind Lane near Shute. To add to the list of successes across the county, after consultation with Devon County Rights of Way team along with the local parishes of Stockland and Dalwood, Devon TRF have started a detailed restoration of the zig zag lane for all users.

The lane has required considerable effort from the council, contractors and TRF volunteers because over time, animals have accessed the stream, damaging banks; field drainage has entered the lane, further eroding it; hazel and holly and other trees have encroached and sleepers have rotted or become unstable. DCC PRoW have declared this road is "Open to All" and that they would only fund repairs if it's rebuilt with the ability to have horses use the same riding line as trail riders. The aim was to have a custom made line to ride in and out of the water on various parts of the lane, whilst allowing walkers to have a dry thoroughfare. This required various obstacles to be removed and new locations for the sleepers found, along with stone or rock pads for the sleepers and square galvanised weld mesh added to the top of sleepers after removal of old chicken wire. Obstacles included small hazel trees removed from the riding line, along with tree stumps and roots to make it easier for riders to make their way along the bank. Old mini digger tracks laid on their side, held in place by road pins, and backfilled with stone and rock accumulated on site have allowed the introduction of material to

stabilise the bankside and gain some ground from the ever-eroding stream. This simple engineering should be durable and hold the course of the stream in place for the future. The old sleepers are being replaced with new ones placed on coping stones and secured into place with the aid of timber half rounds. They are slightly raised to cope with the flow of water in times of flood.

All of this has been achieved by monthly Sunday morning sessions, in conjunction with the use of contractors to, for example, build a bridge suitable for horses. The work completed and ongoing in zig zag lane shows what can be achieved with commitment, organisation and collaboration, with the TRF at the heart of it.



Creative use of old mini digger tracks



Last of the bridges at the bottom of zig zag lane