SUSTRANS Route 811
(canalside Pendeford – Wolverhampton - Smethwick)

Wolves on Wheels Ranger Group Survey

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Sustrans Ranger Assignment

Sustrans provided sets of maps, at 1:50,000 for NCN Route 81, Telford to Sandwell, and at 1:10,000 for the western part of the canal section (approximately Pendeford to Factory Junction).

The assignment from John Grimshaw is as follows: "Could you please return a copy of the large scale (map) of the canal showing which sections are built to a good standard, as our records are incomplete. At Wolverhampton I am worried that the route does not go into the ... city centre. We are also working with the Council on a route out to the Valley Park. Maybe this should be the eventual NCN. Your ideas appreciated."

Our survey report consists of text and images. Map marking is proceeding separately, with the aim of achieving a full set of maps at a common scale. For complete clarity, a set of large-scale Sustrans maps with relevant markings, when available, should be read alongside this survey. Otherwise, the Birmingham A-Z may be recommended; pages from this are appended for general orientation.

This survey covers only the marked route on the canal. The "Valley Park Plan" requires separate study, and is excluded from the present report.

Summary of Survey

* The route from Pendeford to Smethwick (Sandwell) is described west-east with recommendations for dealing with surface improvement, signing, and obstacles or other problematic features.

* Most of the surface is already acceptable, consisting of well-maintained canal towpath. Where the standard is lower, this is indicated.

* Locations are identified where signed access to the route from significant roads is advisable. Signing should mainly be in accordance with Sustrans guidelines and British Waterways policy, but there are canal features, such as junctions, where more may be required.

* Barriers at access points and along the towpath itself are inconsistent with use as a long-distance cycle route for all types of cyclist. Whether properly maintained or not, they fail to prevent illegal motorcycling.

* At the furthest western end (Pendeford) an alternative route is suggested in view of certain problems with the Shropshire Union Canal. This alternative is shown in the Annex.

* The canal route in central Wolverhampton is problematic, as a long section of canal is in a deep cutting with no street access. We do not present a detailed alternative, but attention is drawn to the planned "Canalside Quarter" development which may provide an opportunity to use railway trackbed and other available land. A "Valley Park" route would also access more of the city centre.

* At Coseley Tunnel, the Sustrans alignment on roads avoiding the tunnel is found suitable, but an alternative to dismount and walk through the tunnel (360 yards) may be considered.

The Survey

Preamble

General Points

The route was ridden from west to east, and covers Pendeford (811/04) to Smethwick (811/01). The eastern part of the route (from Dixon Street, Wolverhampton, SO927973, just west of 811/03, to Smethwick Galton Bridge, 811/01) was ridden on 15th July 2002, and the western part (from Pendeford, 811/04, to Dixon Street) was ridden later on 12th September 2002.

The notes and associated images are intended to identify recommended improvements to the route and requirements for signing. Apart from the route marked by Sustrans, an alternative route between Pendeford Mill Lane and Autherley Junction is suggested. Detailed notes and images of this route are given in the Annex at the end of this report.

Signing

Part of this route is also covered by the *Birmingham and Black Country Canal Cycleway*. There are already signs at major access points from highways, but only from Tipton station eastwards. These are marked with 81 red patches. There are no signs for the Cycleway or Route 81 west of Tipton station. The presence of signing appears to depend upon local authorities. There are signs in Sandwell but not in Dudley or Wolverhampton authorities. There are, however, some small direction signs at locations west of Wolverhampton where other cycle routes cross.

Naming

The use of *Sandwell* for the eastern end point is not recommended because Sandwell is not a town but the name of the local authority. The end point should be named as *Smethwick.*

Types of Signs

The latest Sustrans information recommends indicators onto routes from the highways at access points, eventually to be provided by local authorities, but to be put up by Rangers using the *Full NCN Sign* as a temporary measure. On off-road routes, the *Full NCN Sign* should be used frequently along routes, except on canals (British Waterways policy: the sign should be placed only at entry points on the route).

Therefore, in the notes below, we recommend:

- at all access points from highways, a *Full NCN Sign* where no local authority sign is present;
- on the route, a *Full NCN Sign* where needed at some points of entry, but more discreet signing such as red patch stickers on furniture such as bridges, where this is sufficient. Frequent repeater signs along the route are not necessary.

Ideally, signing on the route to show places served by exit points would be desirable but this is not mentioned here in view of British Waterways policy.

At a few points, some extra signing is recommended despite British Waterways policy. This is most important at Smethwick Galton Valley (eastern end point of route 81 and junction with route 5). It also becomes an issue at canal junctions (Autherley, Aldersley, Horseley Fields, Deepfields, Factory, Dudley Port, Albion and Bromford) and the west and east ends of Coseley Tunnel. (See detail in the notes).

Barriers

All barriers found are noted. These serve no purpose and in most cases should be removed. They deny access to child seats, child trailers, trailer bikes, tandems and tricycles. Thus, they exclude many family cyclists and disabled cyclists from the route.

Experience shows that barriers do not prevent illegal motorcyclists gaining access which is their intended purpose. Motorcyclists will force access through a weaker point in the boundary. Illegal motorcycling should be prevented by law enforcement and not by banning legal users from the route. Road traffic offences could be eliminated by preventing all vehicles using the road.

Route Alignment

Since the time of this survey, it has become apparent from the large-scale maps sent by Sustrans that the marked route in some sections east of Factory Junction is on the opposite side of the canal from that which we surveyed. Thus, on these sections some of the obstacles or problems we observed may not apply, and some features may have been missed on the side of the canal not surveyed by us. See detail in text. We will report on these differences after further investigation.

Further Surveying

As mentioned, the canal does not pass through Wolverhampton City Centre and access to the canal through Wolverhampton is restricted. Further routes are needed to fully integrate Sustrans Route 81 with Wolverhampton and the Valley Park cycle route.

Wolves on Wheels feel that further investigation of the following is needed:

1. **Valley Park route:** From the proposed new bus/rail interchange to Aldersley Junction via the city centre, Tettenhall Road and Valley Park.
2. **Great Western track bed and Canalside Quarter route:** From lock 6 (of the Wolverhampton 21) to Millfields Road, Bilston following the old track bed.