

# Upper Tweed Railway Path Project

Interim report on progress of the work of the Project Team

Report Summary – August 2013



*West end of Neidpath viaduct*



THIS PROJECT IS BEING PART-FINANCED BY THE SCOTTISH GOVERNMENT AND THE EUROPEAN COMMUNITY  
SCOTTISH BORDERS LEADER 2007-2013 PROGRAMME



Report Authors  
**David Gray, John Grimshaw**



# Introduction and Summary

In January 2013 The Upper Tweed Railway Path Group commissioned John Grimshaw and David Gray to report on the potential of the 39kms of former railway and to make solid progress towards realising paths along these corridors, and to setting out their place in a wider network of routes.

We found that the routes of these long abandoned railways were remarkably intact and that they could indeed form the basis of attractive and useful paths. We have spent a good deal of time drawing up practical details for each section of a route and in discussing these with the individual landowners to see how to achieve a route which they could support. The discussions and negotiations are ongoing.

The wider context of these potential routes in the Upper Tweed area is fascinating. The existing networks of longer distance routes, and Scotland's Great Trails, exhibit a curious void in this area. The Clyde Walkway, the Annandale Way and the River Ayr Way all stop somewhat short of a common meeting point on the hills south of Biggar. The Southern Upland Way deviates southwards to bypass this same area which otherwise is on the direct line from Sanquhar to Selkirk. National Cycle Routes pass to the west up the A74 corridor and to the east north of Innerleithen. It is all most strange and can perhaps be seen on the map, where the creation of good paths along these Upper Tweed railway

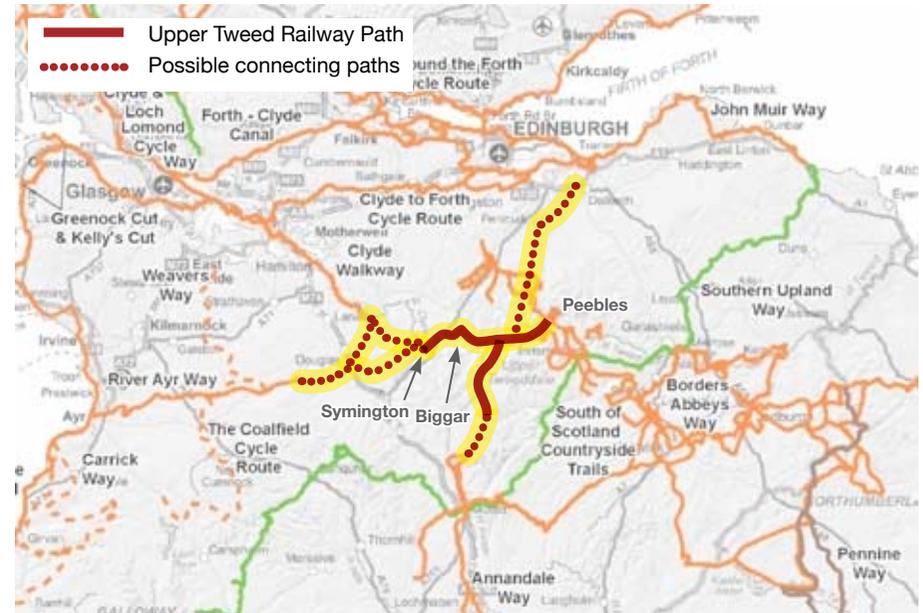
routes could be the catalyst to joining up these wider networks.

Modest extensions of the Upper Tweed routes could resolve a number of these loose ends and it may be worthwhile pursuing this wider context in order to provide a greater focus on the need to put in place good paths in the Upper Tweed area itself. In particular we consider that there would be considerable merit in promoting a cycling route linking the Solway with the Forth. These Coast to Coast routes are very popular with the public and this one could start or end on the Solway at a point due south from the great Forth Railway Bridge, at a point not far from the now demolished Solway Viaduct! This would be the only north to south Coast to Coast route in Scotland.

Whilst our brief does not really extend to resolving the details of all these links we are planning to test this Firth to Firth ride in September, because the economic case for developing these relatively remote routes, the Talla branch in particular, will rely on the hold it takes in the public's imagination and consequent popular use.

This interim report in the meantime has a number of more mundane matters to attend to. It rehearses a brief history of the railways on the area which have long tempted surveyors with the easy connection between the Clyde and the Tweed Valleys. It reviews the local walking, cycling and equestrian routes

## Map of Scotland's Great Trails and National Cycle Routes in the area surrounding the Upper Tweed Valley



in the area, particularly around Peebles, and it reports on the Access policies and programmes of the two Councils.

The Project has identified all the key landowners. Negotiations are ongoing and we anticipate progression to an agreement, one way or another, with each separate landowner.

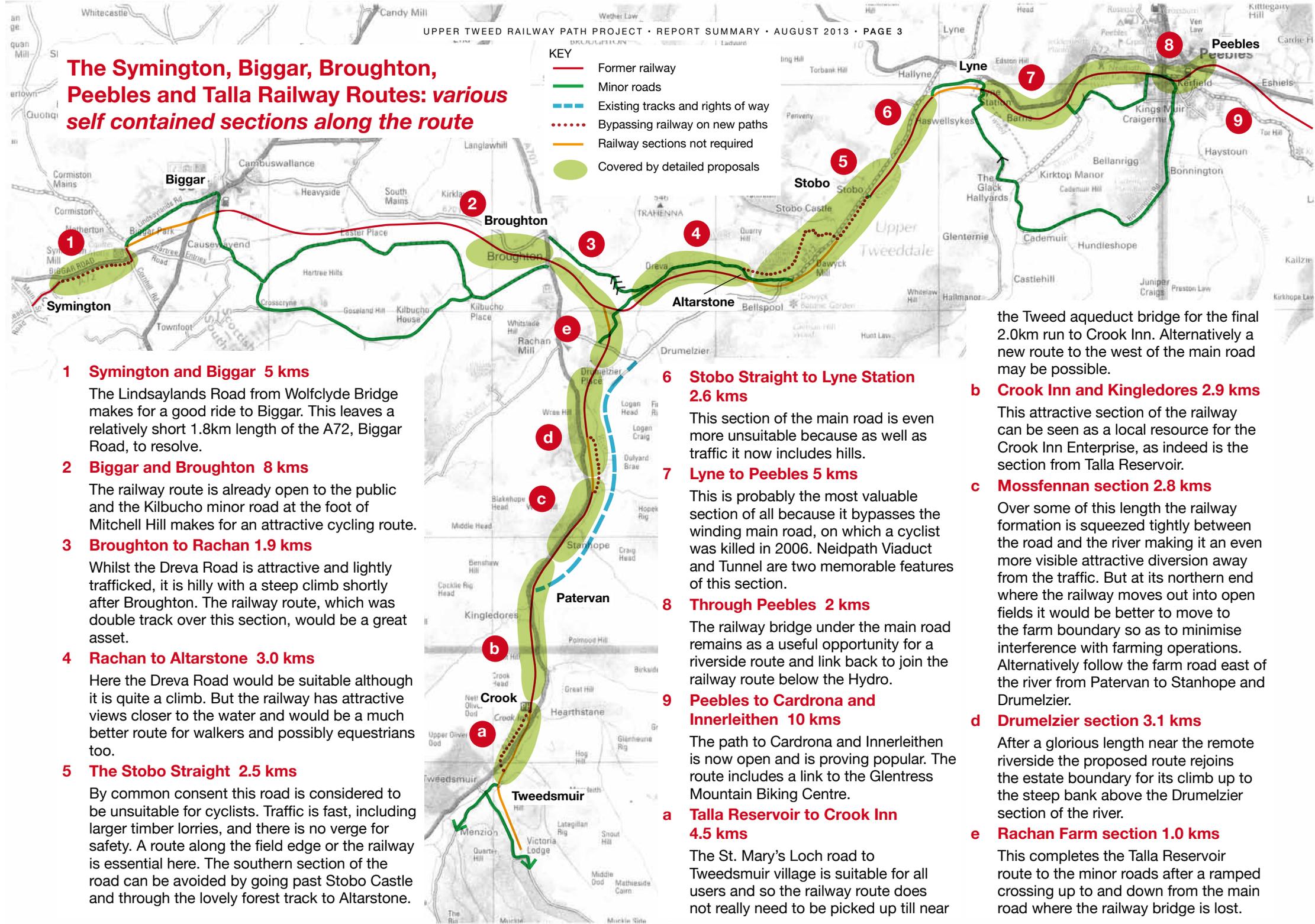
The Upper Tweed Railway Path Group has undertaken a considerable work in consulting widely and enlisting local support. We have augmented this and summarise the overall effort in this report.

Finally we sketch out recommendations for making progress and a possible timetable and programme for achieving what is inevitably a complex project, one which has many strands, and will be delivered in stages over a number of years, before it is finally all in place.

Reusing former railways for paths has proved to be one particularly appropriate use for these formations. The generally level, and often hard surface, makes for exceptional ways through the countryside. This has been demonstrated between Peebles and Innerleithen, and can be equally so here.

## The Symington, Biggar, Broughton, Peebles and Talla Railway Routes: various self contained sections along the route

- KEY**
- Former railway
  - Minor roads
  - - - Existing tracks and rights of way
  - ⋯⋯⋯ Bypassing railway on new paths
  - Railway sections not required
  - Covered by detailed proposals



### 1 Symington and Biggar 5 kms

The Lindsaylands Road from Wolfclyde Bridge makes for a good ride to Biggar. This leaves a relatively short 1.8km length of the A72, Biggar Road, to resolve.

### 2 Biggar and Broughton 8 kms

The railway route is already open to the public and the Kilbucho minor road at the foot of Mitchell Hill makes for an attractive cycling route.

### 3 Broughton to Rachan 1.9 kms

Whilst the Dreva Road is attractive and lightly trafficked, it is hilly with a steep climb shortly after Broughton. The railway route, which was double track over this section, would be a great asset.

### 4 Rachan to Altarstone 3.0 kms

Here the Dreva Road would be suitable although it is quite a climb. But the railway has attractive views closer to the water and would be a much better route for walkers and possibly equestrians too.

### 5 The Stobo Straight 2.5 kms

By common consent this road is considered to be unsuitable for cyclists. Traffic is fast, including larger timber lorries, and there is no verge for safety. A route along the field edge or the railway is essential here. The southern section of the road can be avoided by going past Stobo Castle and through the lovely forest track to Altarstone.

### 6 Stobo Straight to Lyne Station 2.6 kms

This section of the main road is even more unsuitable because as well as traffic it now includes hills.

### 7 Lyne to Peebles 5 kms

This is probably the most valuable section of all because it bypasses the winding main road, on which a cyclist was killed in 2006. Neidpath Viaduct and Tunnel are two memorable features of this section.

### 8 Through Peebles 2 kms

The railway bridge under the main road remains as a useful opportunity for a riverside route and link back to join the railway route below the Hydro.

### 9 Peebles to Cardrona and Innerleithen 10 kms

The path to Cardrona and Innerleithen is now open and is proving popular. The route includes a link to the Glentress Mountain Biking Centre.

### a Talla Reservoir to Crook Inn 4.5 kms

The St. Mary's Loch road to Tweedsmuir village is suitable for all users and so the railway route does not really need to be picked up till near

the Tweed aqueduct bridge for the final 2.0km run to Crook Inn. Alternatively a new route to the west of the main road may be possible.

### b Crook Inn and Kingledores 2.9 kms

This attractive section of the railway can be seen as a local resource for the Crook Inn Enterprise, as indeed is the section from Talla Reservoir.

### c Mossfennan section 2.8 kms

Over some of this length the railway formation is squeezed tightly between the road and the river making it an even more visible attractive diversion away from the traffic. But at its northern end where the railway moves out into open fields it would be better to move to the farm boundary so as to minimise interference with farming operations. Alternatively follow the farm road east of the river from Patervan to Stanhope and Drumelzier.

### d Drumelzier section 3.1 kms

After a glorious length near the remote riverside the proposed route rejoins the estate boundary for its climb up to the steep bank above the Drumelzier section of the river.

### e Rachan Farm section 1.0 kms

This completes the Talla Reservoir route to the minor roads after a ramped crossing up to and down from the main road where the railway bridge is lost.