

The Gloucestershire  
**STONE STILES**  
Project

Initiated by  
Peter T Wilson

© PTW 2021

# WHAT ARE STILES?

A means of passing across a  
land boundary  
involving a man made structure

# What are they made of ?

Natural products at hand

until Victorian times

Usually wood or stone and  
in upland areas tend towards Stone

Our first thoughts tend towards wooden stiles  
such as this on Monarch's Way  
near Bourton on the Water



However this Project is about Stone Stiles  
because they are durable and very old

They tend to be north of a line from  
Bournemouth to Middlesborough

There are said to be over 50 styles of  
stone stiles

In simple terms there are 3 types

**STEP**

**SQUEEZE**

**SLAB**

each with many variants



## THE STEP STILE

An example found near Nympsfield  
but rare in the Cotswold



The SQUEEZE stile  
This one can be seen near Randwick

The most common stile is the **SLAB** type  
found everywhere in Gloucestershire  
including Tarlton



Stiles have become part of the  
**cultural history**  
of our Gloucestershire landscape

*Extract from the New York Times : An account of a  
Cotswold walking holiday by Elizabeth Gunn,  
May 25, 1997.*

*'Walking down, we began climbing stiles over the fences and stone walls we'd admired from above. The Cotswolds alternative to gates, stiles are built of wood or hewn of stone, in a great variety of designs conceived on the spot by the builder. They commanded more respect as the week went on; we crossed 83 of them. The first few stiles of each day were fun, the next half-dozen more like work, and the last two or three practically insurmountable'.*

## STONE STILES

- How old are they?
- Where did the stones come from?
- Why are they important?
- Are they protected?

How old are they?

This very worn one at Ebrington looks very old

Look at how worn it is.

This one probably dates from the main Enclosure period 1650 – 1850 but most date from 1700-1800.



However some can go back to monastic enclosures in the 14th century and before.

With enclosure landowners were often required to keep the footpaths exactly where they have been since.....

## Why are they important?

- Stone stiles are on ancient pathways which can tell us about the past
- They are now part of our man-made rural landscape architecture
- Stile type may offer an insight into original intended use of land
- 'Lost' ones may indicate old rights of way

'Abandoned' rights of way  
near Oakridge & at Guiting Power



Where did the stones come from?

Almost always from the local quarry.

**Step stiles** were easy to build from local stone

Often a lot of effort went into shaping or cutting **Squeeze stiles**

**Slab stiles** needed careful selection for size and thickness but is suggested that some were borrowed from local ancient burial barrows

A lot of stones were 'borrowed' as at  
and Box Wood



**Are stiles protected?**

**NO**

**The ancient path (PROWs) are!**

The consequence –tossed aside



# SLABS STILES ARE THE MOST ENDANGERED

Some too low for cattle  
Boundary Court, Stroud



Others too high for people  
near Belas Knap



## Who helps maintain landscape features?

- **The Countryside Stewardship Scheme** ...emphasises the importance of conserving traditional landscapes and provides grants for the protection of historic landscape features...
- **The Heritage Fund** ...includes in its key priority policy the importance of landscape features such as ridge and furrow and old orchards and discovering lost pathways
- **The National Heritage** ...encourages the use of the countryside to promote mental wellbeing, and physical health.

There is funding for repairing stone walls

ASHCROFT ESTATE



so why not  
**ANCIENT STILES?**

New on the scene  
**Environmental Land Management  
ELMs**

It will replace the current support for agriculture.

with

‘Public Money for the Public Good’

Environmental Land Management: ELMS  
whilst encouraging  
hedgerow management to benefit wildlife  
omits to mention stone stiles  
which  
contribute to ecological diversity and  
our Gloucestershire landscapes.

## The Project to date...

- 125+ volunteers over the last 6 months have photographed over 400 stiles since July 2020
- We have been given records of 300 Stiles in the AONB
  - We believe another 150/200 yet to be record

## What next...

We have to:

- Identify the type of stone used
  - Research the history of each stile
  - Record adjacent landscape features
  - Note the adjacent Archaeology
  - Create the App.
  - Make it available for all to enjoy
- Ensure stiles qualify for grants

# What do we need to finish the job?

## Volunteers

Geologists to identify the stones and where they came from

Archaeologists to provide information on the stile vicinity

Historians to research the local paths, sites, landscapes

Authors to create the App entries

Creative people to catalogue the stiles

## Money

To fund and develop the software

To reimburse volunteers' expenses

and then we can...

- Publish the App.
- Promote the use of the App. in Gloucestershire
- Demonstrate it as a national pilot for upland areas

# The Gloucestershire Stone Style Project

© PTW 2021

Initiated by P. T. Wilson  
supported by



The  
countryside  
charity

A community project for community benefit



## **Confidential**

**All the photographs in this presentation are private property and may not be reproduced in any format without written permission**

Photographs courtesy of:

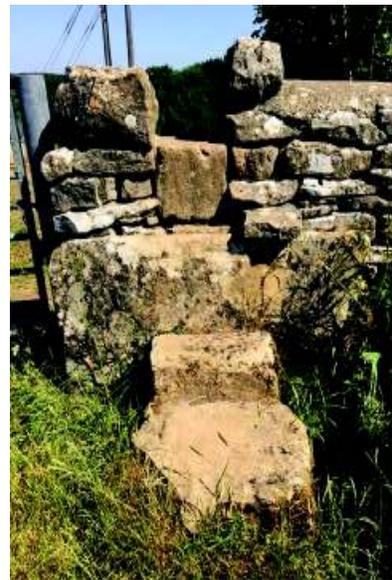
Alex Robinson, Ann Dickinson, Pam Perry, Barry Parsons, Tony Boyce,  
Juliet Steward,  
Maureen Arthur, Jennifer Sawtell,  
Geoff Cuthbert, J S Waddington  
Jon Maddock, Nicholas Mann, Charlie Morriss, Maggie Booth\*, Alison  
Widgery,  
Steve Hemmings, Fay Britton, Rachel Cunnyngame

\* Maggie Booth is leading on Photography and PR

# To conclude

SOME UNUSUAL STILES

adapted



## Lost stiles and paths



Are you aware of the one in our field (Coffin path) ?

I do not believe that it is on a public right of way. Nic

Unusual finds  
a metal squeeze adaptation & a twin squeeze



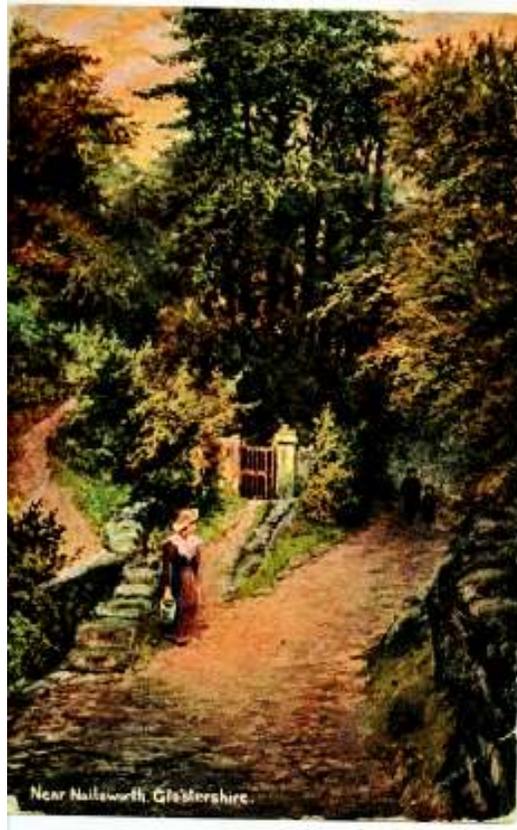
Over maintained but at least maintained  
used cement



# Variations



Late Victorian



Edwardian?

So you expect me to jump this!

