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Introduction

Mary/Michael Pilgrims Way, is a not for profit organisation set up to establish and promote a pilgrimage route across England, from the west of Cornwall to the Norfolk coast, to be walked as a whole or in sections, by people of any faith or none.

Along the way are many iconic landmarks significant in Christian and pre-Christian spirituality, such as St Michael's Mount, Glastonbury Abbey and Tor and Avebury, as well as numerous lesser known sites which inspire or nourish the spirit, including churches and holy wells, wayside crosses and standing stones, burial mounds and hill forts, each with a story to reveal. It also passes through some of England's most beautiful landscapes and along ancient thoroughfares such as the Ridgeway and Icknield Way, which were likely routes of pilgrimage for thousands of years.

The motivations for undertaking a pilgrimage can be many and varied, but its practice by so many cultures around the world suggests that it fulfils some deep need within humanity.

Pilgrimage had a long tradition in the U.K. prior to the Reformation and writers such as Peter Stanford observe a reawakening of interest. It is a spiritual and cultural journey, but our vision also chimes with modern concerns for the environment and research which promotes the benefits for physical and emotional wellbeing of "nature cures."

For us in a restless, noisy and fast moving society, the possibility to depart from daily life, slow to the natural rhythm and pace of walking and journey to or between sacred places can be hugely restorative, helping us to reconnect to ourselves and also to attune more deeply to as T.S. Elliot described it, "the still point of the turning world."

See how nature – trees, flowers, grass – grows in silence; see the stars, the moon and the sun, how they move in silence... We need silence to be able to touch souls.

Mother Teresa

I recently led a pilgrimage walk in association with M.I.N.D. and a local Primary Care Trust for clients dealing with mental health problems, who responded enthusiastically to the experience. This reminded me of one of many inspiring encounters I had whilst walking the ancient pilgrimage route to Santiago de Compostella, when I met and walked for a while with a group of pilgrims from Belgium. They included young people from disadvantaged backgrounds who had been offered the opportunity to make a supported pilgrimage. This seemed a creative and humane response to some of the issues of alienation and disconnection that they had experienced and which had manifested in a range of dysfunctional behaviours.

The pilgrim's instinct is deep set in the human heart. It is indeed an affair of the heart rather than the head.

Evelyn Waugh

The Route

We are building on the inspiration of many who have gone before including John Michell and most particularly Hamish Miller and Paul Broadhurst. In the book *The Sun and The Serpent*, they mapped identifiable streams of subtle earth energy which they had dowsed and traced across the landscape from Cornwall to Norfolk. These they suggested, may have influenced the location of sacred sites along their length for thousands of years, providing focal points for rituals and festivals designed to nourish and re-energise the earth, emphasise the reverential relationship with the forces of nature and support

community cohesion. Examples of such intimately engaged, sacred relationship with the earth can still be seen today in tribal cultures around the world.

In the Christian era many of these sites were rededicated. Stripped of the pagan origins they became identified with Archangel Michael and Mary. Michael is particularly associated with the high places such as St Michael's Mount near Penzance, St Michael de Rupe on Brentor and St Michael's tower on the summit of Glastonbury Tor, whilst Mary churches are more prevalent in sheltered valley locations.

Whatever your belief system, we believe that there will be something life enhancing for anyone who embarks on this journey with an openness to what arises and a gratitude for what is experienced.

If the only prayer you say in your whole life is "thank you", that would suffice.

Meister Eckhart

The Pilot Project

Our first objective is to establish a pilot section of the route between Brentor and Glastonbury. This has a nice symmetry from Tor to Tor, connects the wild beauty of Dartmoor with the mythical Isle of Avalon, a legendary destination of Joseph of Arimathea and even as William Blake invokes in his poem Jerusalem, the young Jesus.

This journey offers a context to explore over 5000 years of human history and culture, encompassing sites resonant with the evolution of spirituality and religion; politics; the role of the monarchy and economic rise and fall. All these influences have left their mark on the landscape and the built environment along the way and have a relevance to how we live today.

The sense of treading ground made holy by past events is crucial. The experience of the pilgrim in actually walking in the way of others enables them to become a participant in all that has happened. The pilgrim becomes one with all who have gone before.

Martin Robinson

The maps below give a symbolic representation of this journey and indicate some of the significant points along the way. Many of these were identified by Miller and Broadhurst, others are based on the research of the Dartmoor artist and dowser John Christian, whilst the rest are additions we have made in surveying and walking the route.

We are also conscious of the need for the route to be safe and aesthetically pleasing. In

this regard we have avoided main roads, utilising the footpath network and open moorland where possible and minor roads where necessary. The route has a flowing progression across the landscape which has required that we leave out some sites which we would otherwise wish to include.

Progress so Far

We have received generous financial support from a number of benefactors and grants from the Dartmoor Sustainable Development Fund and Cooperative Community Fund. We are also grateful to Satish Kumar and Ba Miller who have agreed to be our project patrons.

Volunteers have completed a detailed survey of the pilot section and we are receiving the cooperation of Dartmoor National Park Authority, Devon and Somerset County Councils as well as liaising with a number of charities, church and community groups along the way. We have designed a logo which will be used, laser etched onto sustainably sourced oak to signpost the route.

Next Steps

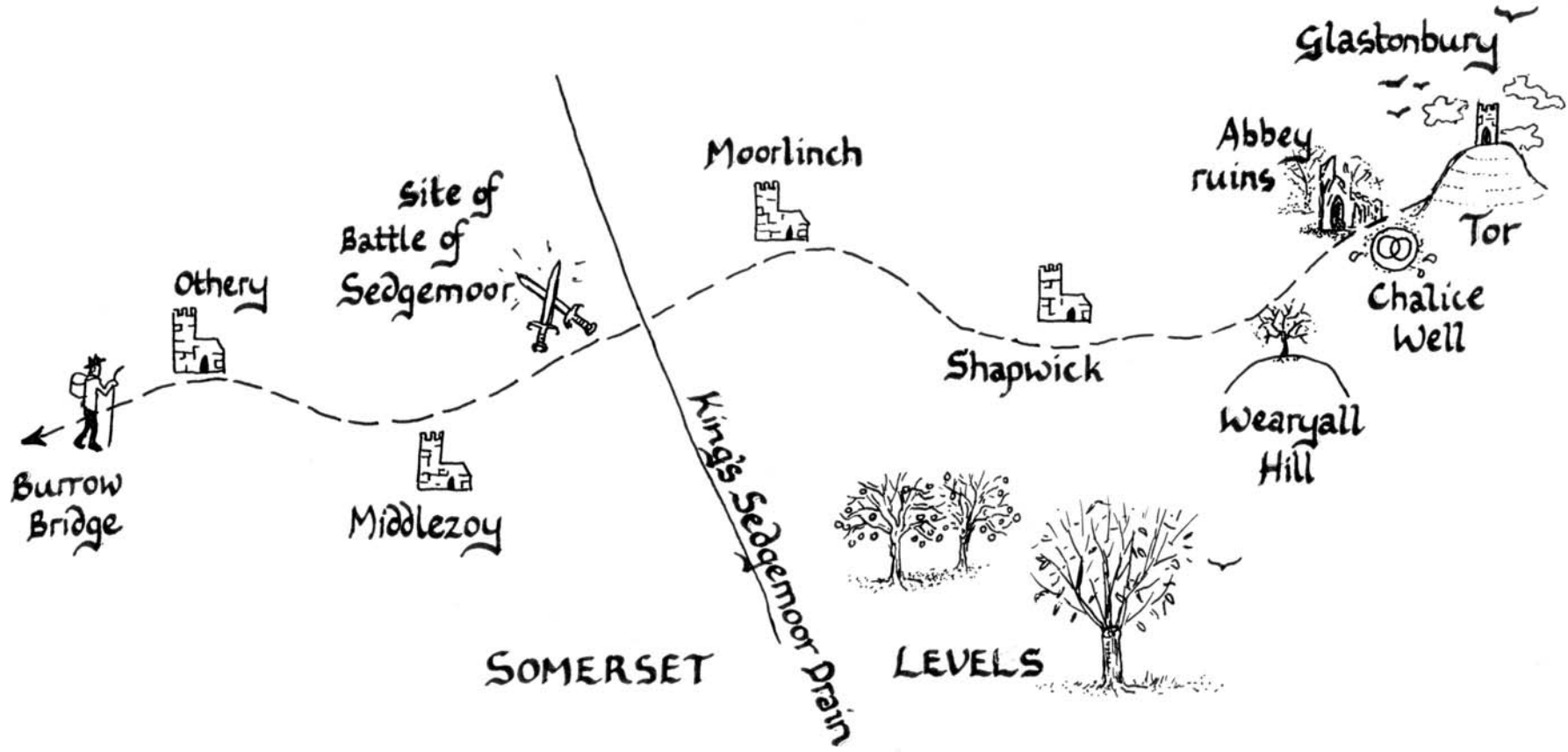
Waymarking the route, developing a website and writing a guide booklet for pilgrims walking the route are the next obvious steps. We also intend to hold more public meetings along the way to discuss our plans and promote awareness in other ways such as writing articles for local community magazines.

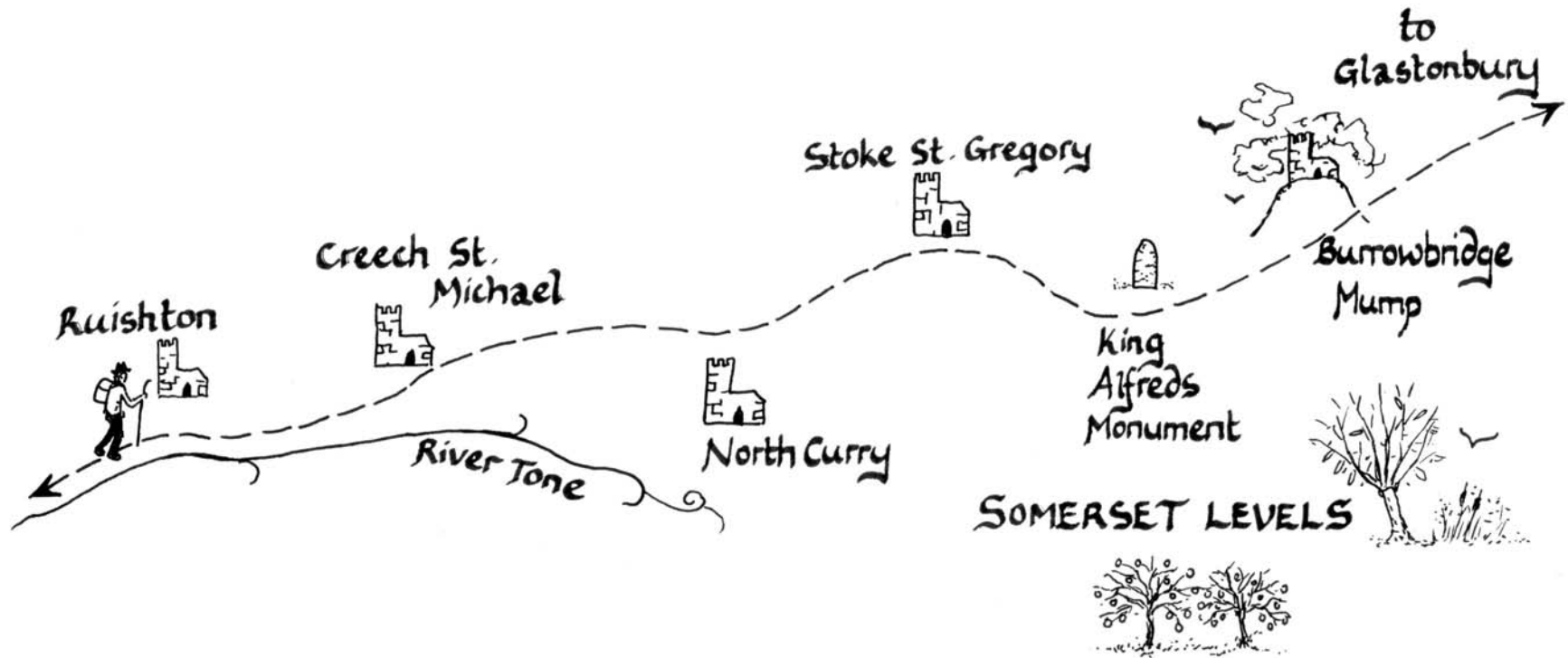
We propose to create a membership scheme in which for a small annual subscription members will receive a package of benefits, including guidebook and newsletters as well as showing their support for the project and having the opportunity to get actively involved in updating us with information about the route, sharing with other members their experiences of the pilgrimage as well as stories, poems and pictures inspired by the journey.

Any feedback to the project would be useful. This may include information that may be relevant for the website or guidebook or any questions raised by this project synopsis. We would also like to hear from you if you are inspired by the vision and want more details of the membership scheme or how to get involved in other ways.

*Believe a further shore is reachable from here.
Believe in miracles and cures and healing wells.*

Seamus Heaney







SOMERSET

