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Providing Public, Private and Livestock Access

8.3 Access paths suitable for disabled users

RIVER SKERNE

LOCATION – DARLINGTON, CO DURHAM, NZ301160

DATE INSTALLED – JUNE 1997

LENGTH – CONCRETE PATH 1000M X 1.8M, BITMAC PATH 225M X 2.5M

COST – CONCRETE PATH £55,000, BITMAC PATH £43,000

Concrete footpath and meanders

Description

Prior to the restoration project formal paved access alongside the river was very limited but was found by survey to be high on local peoples priorities for improvements. Two separate paths were included at the locations indicated on the project plan that precedes the techniques section of this manual.

The first passes along the south bank of the river where new meanders were created (*see Technique 1.4*) and links an existing footbridge at Hutton Avenue with a new footbridge near the railway line. A smooth concrete path was built after discussion with the Fieldfare Trust. The Trust is concerned with access for all but has special knowledge of disabled peoples' needs.

The second links an existing high level path bordering housing at Albert Road with the historic Skerne railway bridge that is featured on the UK £5 note. The path drops down to pass under Albert Road and then runs along the north bank of the river. It will form part of a future cycleway through Darlington and is built in bitumen macadam (Bitmac).

Design

Concrete Path

Designed to enable wheelchairs and pushchairs to pass freely, the gradients and surface of the path were such that all users would have easy passage. Resting/passing areas were placed approximately every 100m in positions affording interesting views of the site. The route was determined by the gradient of the land, the extent of winter floodwater and suggestions from the Fieldfare Trust. A proprietary concrete material and surface finish was selected to provide a smooth non slip footing and low maintenance. A buff colour was chosen to blend with the surroundings once weathered.

To intercept rain water running down from the adjacent slopes gravel drains were placed under the path and in others they were positioned alongside the path. A 0.1m layer of crushed stone was laid as standard but where vehicle crossing points were designated, extra stone was used to accommodate the extra loading. Coloured concrete (0.075m min.) was poured and the surface finished in the prescribed pattern.

Bitmac Path (Figures 8.3.1 – 8.3.2)

A great deal of preliminary work was needed before the path could be laid, including:

- revetment of the river bank either side of the bridge;
- retaining walls alongside a gas main and contaminated landfill;
- lowering land levels;
- lowering of manholes.

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The route was designed as a combined footpath and cycleway and runs down a grassy slope, beneath Albert Road bridge and along the riverside to Skerne Bridge. Several safety features were incorporated:

- where the ground slopes away steeply, a small mound was placed on the downward side to restrict cyclists to the path;
- riverside hand railing either side of the bridge at the bottom of the slope;
- cycle barriers were placed at the bottom of the slope to slow cyclists as they pass under the bridge;
- the width of path allows wheelchairs to pass;
- level resting areas at intervals down the slope.

Drainage was important. To accommodate this, there is a fall of 50mm across the 2.5m wide path and a longitudinal gulley drain to collect run off from the slope above.

Bitmac footpath towards Skerne Railway Bridge

Subsequent performance 1995 – 2001

Both paths have proved to be extremely popular with all sections of the community and are used by different social groups throughout the day. Initial fears that the paths might become motorcycle tracks have not materialised, probably because they are 'policed' by so many pedestrians. Seating has been requested by older people wishing to rest and view the riverlife nearby.

Drainage of rain water from adjacent slopes proved critical and some remedial works were needed to clear occassional puddles and associated silts that muddied the path.

Figure 8.3.1
PLAN OF RIVERSIDE PATH TO SKERNE RAILWAY BRIDGE

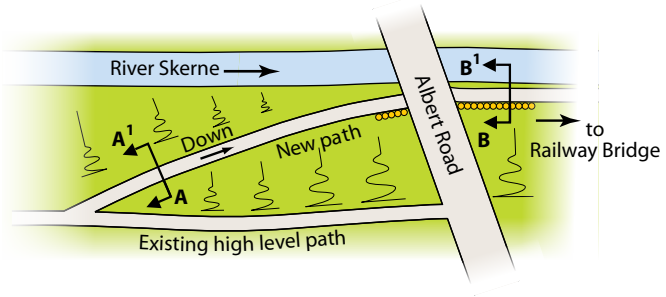
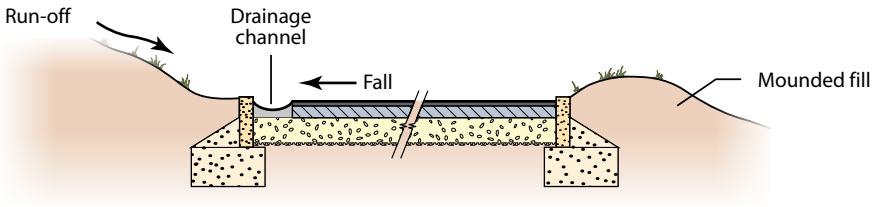
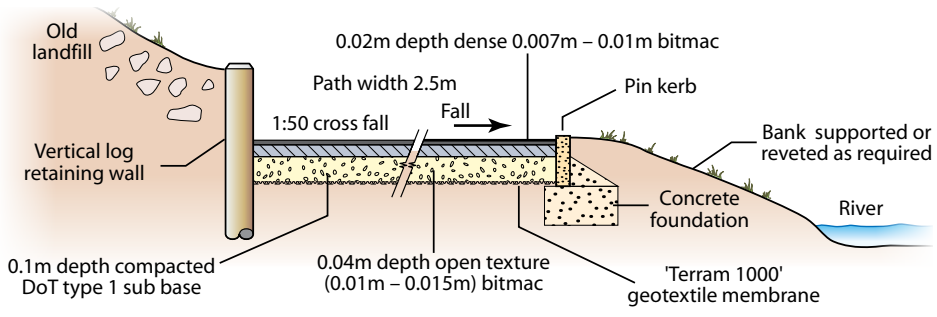


Figure 8.3.2
SECTION THROUGH RIVERSIDE RATH TO SKERNE RAILWAY BRIDGE



Section **A** – **A**^{1}
(downhill path)



Section **B** – **B**^{1}
(riverside path)

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Working to restore & enhance our rivers