# The Sandstone Way: a new route for mountain bikers

The Sandstone Way will be a new 100 miles mountain biking route between Berwick upon Tweed and Hexham along the Sandstone Ridge in North Northumberland linking numerous sandstone features, crags and outcrops. The route traverses through an amazing ever-changing landscape which is rich in history, geological features and iconic scenery.

The Sandstone Way starts and ends at two Northumberland towns namely Berwick upon Tweed and Hexham both of which are served by rail. In between these two towns, the *Sandstone Way* links numerous villages and small communities including Wooler, Rothbury and Bellingham; though slightly off route, Belford is a further option. A range of en route accommodation is available.

The Sandstone Way is primarily aimed at mountain bikers; as much of the route as possible is off-road and the route safely crosses a constant flow of rivers, four main roads and two railway lines.

The Sandstone Way will appeal to all abilities from families and less experienced mountain bikers, those at intermediate standard and fit competent mountain bikers. The first group are likely to take 3 or 4 days to complete it whilst the ‘fit and the fast’ could possibly ride the route in 2 days but in all probability most would wish they had taken 3 days. It’s almost certain some mountain bikers will try to do the whole route in a day but very few will manage especially if they ride the optional harder sections.

The Sandstone Way uses varied terrain along its whole length with the preferred alignment taking best advantage of an interesting mix of double-width dirt tracks, sections of singletrack, unsurfaced lanes and bridleways of all types as well as byways and little known Unclassified County Roads (UCRs). Inevitably, there are numerous linking sections of quiet minor roads and surfaced country lanes. All the above are existing rights of way but two permissive sections may be included subject to landowner agreement. The essence of the route’s quality is how all these elements combine.

The core route will be clearly shown but where possible, more challenging variations will be indicated. Eight optional loops are also offered which mean the linear route will also be able to provide entertainment to ‘day ride’ mountain bikers who wish to cycle back to their starting point.

It has been decided The Sandstone Way will be waymarked by late August 2014 now that landowner consultations are complete. The Sandstone Way map of the 2014 route will be available from the website and normal retail outlets when published. The route will also be available for GPS users on a pay-per-download basis via reputable providers and the Sandstone Way website which should go live in late August 2014.

A ‘payback’ scheme will operate to ensure the route is managed in the future and offers of sponsorship for the map and website will be welcomed. The Sandstone Way has to be self-sustainable and is therefore a not-for profit project. The Sandstone Way will be officially opened in 2015 after the route has bedded in.

In summary, The Sandstone Way really is an enjoyable journey down (or up) just about the whole length of Northumberland which is one of England’s best kept secrets. Apart from its undoubted merit as a thoroughly enjoyable mountain bike experience, the Sandstone Wayhas a fascinating cultural, historical and geological tale to tell when all its aspects and features are stitched together. It is not just a lovely scenic ride along its entire length, there are sections which are truly iconic and almost certainly, all those who cycle any part of this route will want to come back for more.

[www.sandstoneway.org.uk](http://www.sandstoneway.org.uk) will be promoted from late August 2014 – for direct information contact: info@sandstoneway.org.uk from that date - SEE BELOW

