

VIEWFINDING

Expanded City: Cycling G Renshaw 2017



Viewfinding

Living on the edge of Sheffield where the urban fabric quickly frays into Pennine hills and valleys, my evenings and weekends are punctuated by cyclists heading out to test legs and lungs on the relentless gradients of the upper dales. Glimpsed through the window some go alone, but many ride two abreast or in large groups. I witness their flash of vivid lycra, overhear sudden snatches of conversation, and at night the pulse and flutter of bike lights temporarily perforate the dark. The riders' regular looping circuits stitch together town and country.

In another place, artist/cyclist Gavin Renshaw has been also journeying out into his own hinterland, from the geographical division of the broad river valley, across the coastal plain and into the high moorland adjacent to Preston, Lancashire. His rides allow him to look back from less familiar perspectives at the chimneys, spires and stadia that distinguish its roofline, triangulating a physical and critical relationship between the built environment and the land out of which the city grew.

Whilst he starts and finishes at the Avenham Park pavilion, the rides are purposefully unplanned, with the opinion that getting lost is preferable to travelling directly. The routes are later mapped with GPS software, which reveal the gentle curves or tight corners of his 14km jaunts and more extensive 90km rides. As well as these positional recordings done on the move, Renshaw also stops periodically to gaze back at Preston with his camera. Depending on the vantage point, sometimes the moors form a back drop, or the buildings rear brick and concrete against blue and grey skies; sometimes the place seems lost in haze, nestling in the valley amidst the dusk of evening or the gloom of incoming rain.

Photographic historians have made much of the fortuitous co-incidence of bike and camera. With the coming of the mass-produced cycle, personal longer-distance transportation was democratised for ordinary people, enabling many to seek the clean air and beauty beyond town boundaries. At the same time, the development of portable cameras and a craze for photography offered the chance for bicycle tourists to image for themselves the places they ventured. New views were opened up both literally and metaphorically in terms of the landscapes encountered, the feelings provoked, and the sense in which a hometown might now be understood as existing in a broader social and political context.

The shift in viewpoints generated by these seemingly modest technologies created powerful biological and social change. Scientists have, for example, suggested that the invention of the bicycle was one of the key events in recent human evolution: since cycling provided access to marriage partners outside of the local community it had the effect of increasing genetic diversity. And social historians have demonstrated how cycling had a profound influence on women's emancipation, both in terms of the self-reliance and freedom it developed for individuals, and as a means by which suffragettes were able to reach the broader constituencies to whom they addressed their campaign.

That cycling was political from its earliest days is also made clear in the role played by the hugely popular Clarion Cycling Clubs. Named after the weekly socialist newspaper founded by Robert Blatchford in 1891, the clubs held rallies, and travelled the country distributing books and pamphlets. Rather than taking a dogmatic or theoretical approach, the clubs promoted the practice of an egalitarian, democratic and sociable life. As one early member put it 'the Clarion Cyclist is a Socialist utilising his cycle for the combined purposes of pleasure and propaganda.' The National Clarion Club thrives, and alongside protecting and furthering the interests of cycling and cyclists, its constitution still aims to 'promote Mutual Aid, Good Fellowship and support for the Principles of Socialism.'

The Clarion's manifesto isn't the only indication that cycling remains political. The monthly gatherings of Critical Mass, or the Naked Bike Rides that take place internationally, are both a celebration of the activity and a protest against poor infrastructure and the continued dominance of motor vehicles. 'Biketivists' campaign for the design of safer roads and for a rethought transport strategy that would see bikes replace cars on many of those short local journeys that make cities so congested and polluted. They want to extend the pleasures and possibilities of cycling beyond those already converted, creating an alternative vision of the urban future.

Historian Eric Hobsbawm famously thought that if physical mobility was considered an essential condition of freedom then the bicycle was probably 'the greatest single device for achieving what Marx has called the full realisation of being human invented since Gutenberg, and the only one without obvious drawbacks.' It's appropriate then that Renshaw's project brings print together with photography and contemporary GPS technology, in order to reveal and amplify the liberating perspectives of cycling, with which they have a strong affinity. That these views emerge from such a richly critical history brings depth and rigour to his investigation, opening up a sense of how we see, and might imagine afresh, the expanded city in which we live.

Joanne Lee

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The Expanded City

'Renshaw's initial project, of documenting distant views of Preston from various points around the periphery stems from a number of long-held concerns. An interest in architecture informs the desire to record how monumental buildings such as museums, churches and football stadiums can be brought to prominence or concealed depending on perspective. The process by which Renshaw produces his photographic images is also related to the method of triangulation, whereby accurate mapping is made possible by measuring the angles from a known point to a fixed baseline. This relates in another way to his interest in local architecture, whereby the viewpoints from which Renshaw's images are photographed can only be noticed from a cyclist's perspective, constituting a kind of vernacular triangulation.

This pragmatic use of architectural and natural landmarks stems from Renshaw's desire to experiment with the different ways that architecture can be utilised and viewed. By depicting the City from a distance, and using its landmarks as triangulation points, the photographic images that Renshaw produces could be seen simply as a by-product of his research. And yet, these images have an aesthetic value beyond the distances and measurable perspectives that they portray. Taken as individual pictures, the stormy skied, or sunlit views of the landscape and city seem to point to different movements and methods in the depiction of landscape. For example, the more dramatic images taken from a high vantage point nod towards the concept of 'the sublime' in Romantic painting.

Although, as Renshaw asserted, these images are not meant to be viewed one by one, and it is the whole collection that constitutes the work. When viewed together it becomes clear that whilst each image is technically 'true', the perspective in each can completely alter the apparent make-up of the City. Different buildings and parks gain prominence depending on the angle from which they are viewed, and the temptation to settle on a single iconic depiction of the City's skyline is thwarted.'

An excerpt from a longer text which is available from the website below.

Lauren Velvick

l-velvick.tumblr.com

Viewfinding

The idea of gauging distance and location through reading the landscape is a method which was employed by the touring cyclists in the first half of the 20th century, using chimney stacks and church spires as navigation markers to indicate direction and the expanse of milage between settlements. The system encapsulates a romantic purity and simplicity in regard as to how we view the land and how we move within it.

The city from afar has always had an allure for artists. Capturing it as a whole, its prominence on the horizon and its topographical position, concisely illustrates a moment in time. Cities by their nature continually expand, new developments and housing increase its circumference like rings on a tree. Simultaneously, the demolition of redundant structures within the city centre and their replacement with new office and high-rise and the inevitable infrastructure required to service these additions, all make for a constantly evolving picture.

For me, this was how the Expanded City project first began. Taking snapshots and drawings of Preston from its periphery while exploring by bicycle. Usually I explore without using a map, often getting more than a little lost. A pre-planned route sets you on a distinct path and I have found that it is more enjoyable to record a route post ride rather than defining your journey to a destination from the outset. Travelling this way really helped me understand the connections between the city and the outskirts, neighbouring towns and the countryside in between. It affords you to travel at a pace whereby which the the landscape is both measurable and memorable. Recently I was able to look into a small portion of the fine art archive at the Harris Museum and Art Gallery to help ground this idea in a historical context. The collection is extensive and demonstrates chronologically key stages in the expansion of a market town to an industrial hub and subsequently leading towards its city status chronicled through a huge index of prints, paintings and maps. This project is my own way of adding to the ephemeral layers of a cities expansion through cataloguing viewpoints and the locations from which they were taken.

G Renshaw

Preston from Penwortham Hill
T. Allom
Circa 1833
engraving
Courtesy of The Harris Museum & Art Gallery



Preston
from Penwortham Hill
J. Jenkinson
Circa July 1820
engraving
(close to Hurst Grange Park)
Courtesy of The Harris Museum & Art Gallery





1



2



3



4



5



6

See centre spread map for viewpoint number locations

- 1 Preston dock
- 2 Bullnose junction of dock & River Ribble
- 3 Freckleton marshes
- 4 The Ship Inn, Bunker Street, Freckleton
- 5 Kirkham Road
- 6 Sidgreaves Lane



7



8



9



10



11



12

- 7 Cuerdale Lane
- 8 Roach Road
- 9 Blackburn Old Road
- 10 Hill House Lane
- 11 Hill House Lane
- 12 Smithy Lane



13



14



15

13 Pippin Street
 14 Billinge End Road
 15 Tockholes Road



14



16



17



17



18



19


- 14 Billenge End Road
- 16 Church Lane
- 17 Coopers Lane
- 18 Coote Lane
- 19 Handshaw Drive

THE EXPANDED CITY


Cycling routes and viewpoints of Preston


 Start/finish Avenham Park pavilion

 Viewpoint location

 Bleasdale route- 83km

 Parbold/Tockholes route- 90km

 Brindle route- 31km

 Penwortham route- 14km

 Kirkham route- 38km

 Preston Guild Wheel- 34km

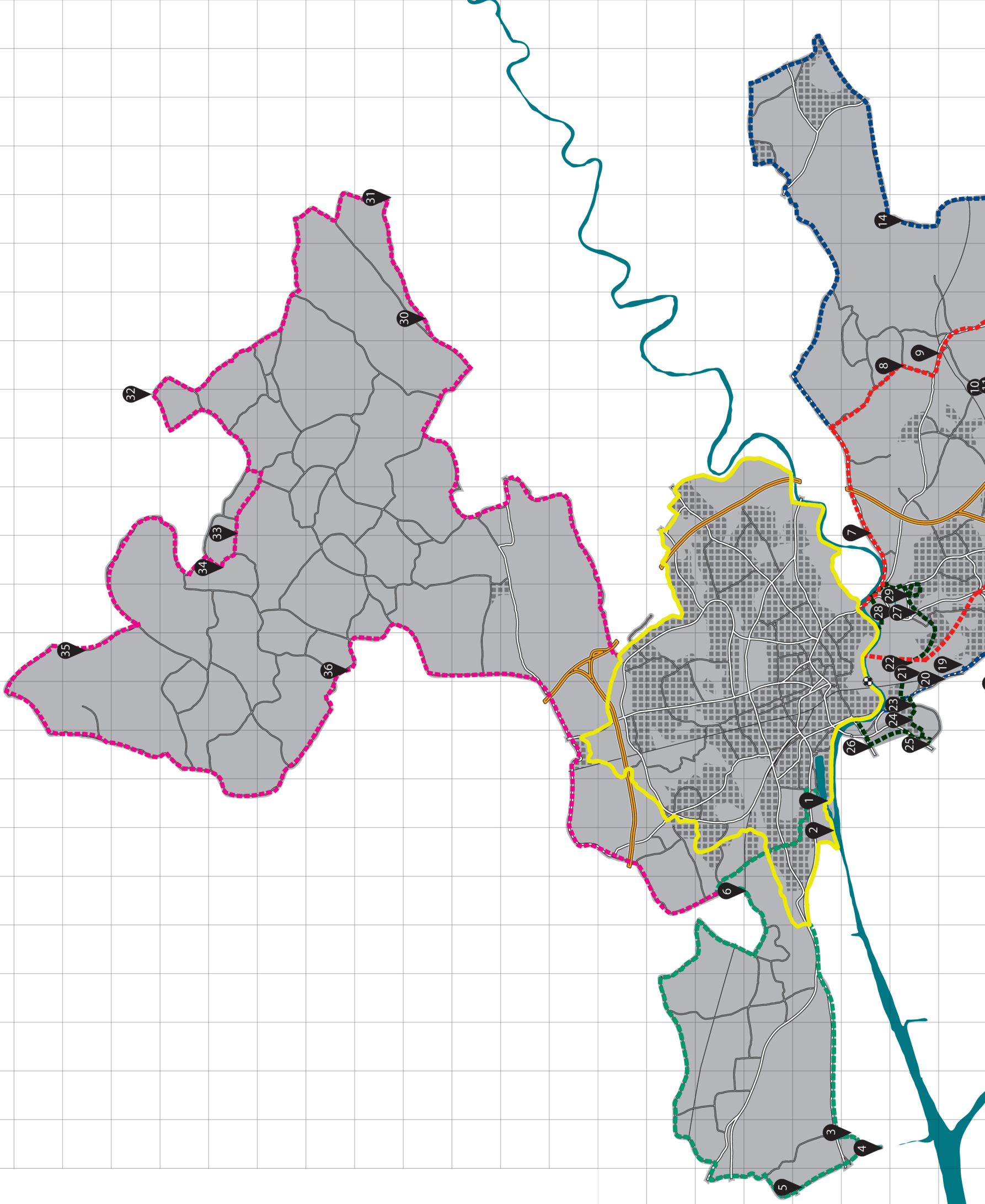
 Motorway (no cycling)

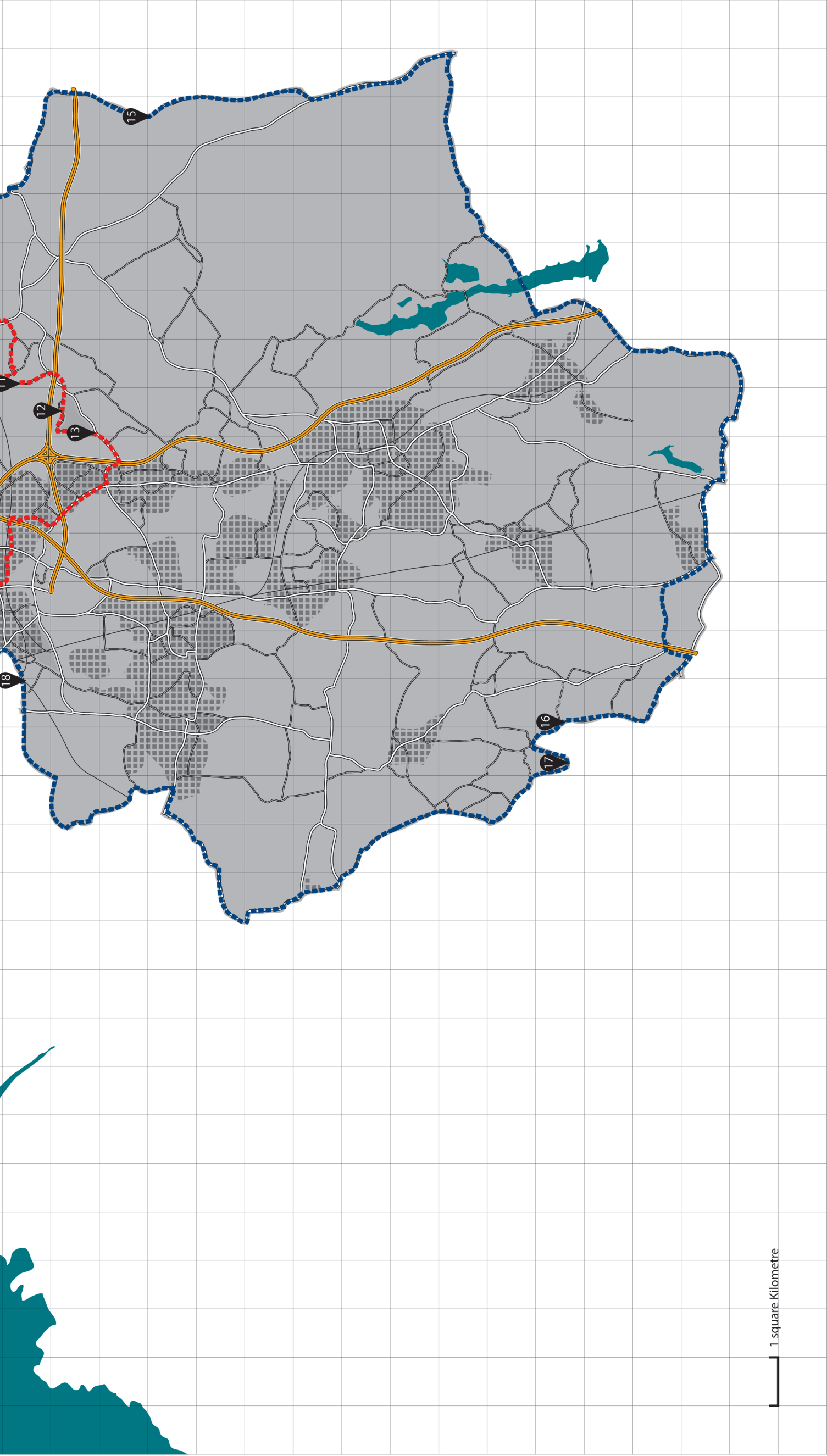
 A Road

 B Road

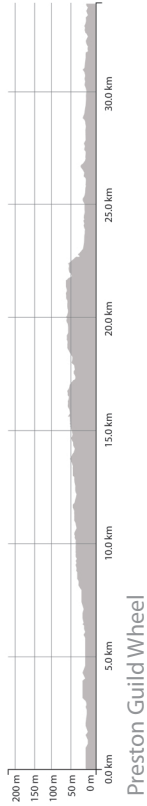
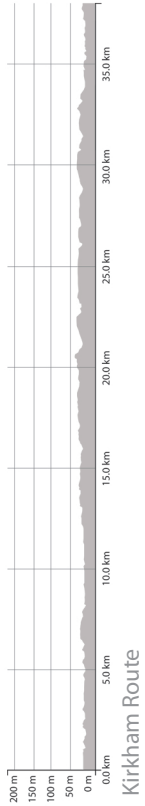
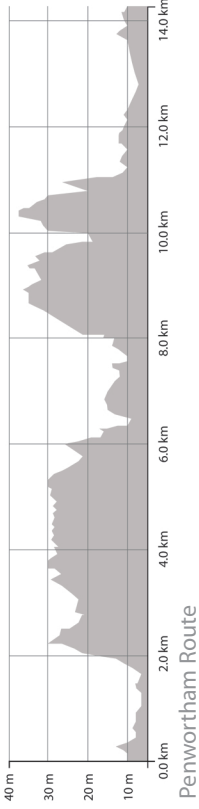
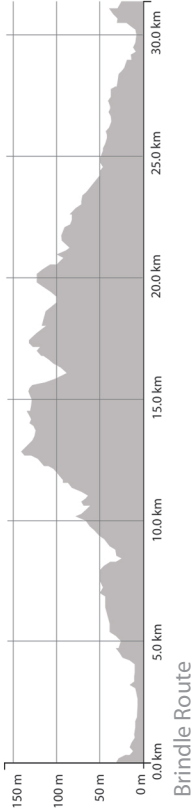
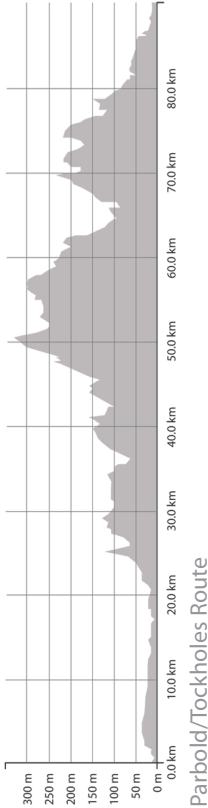
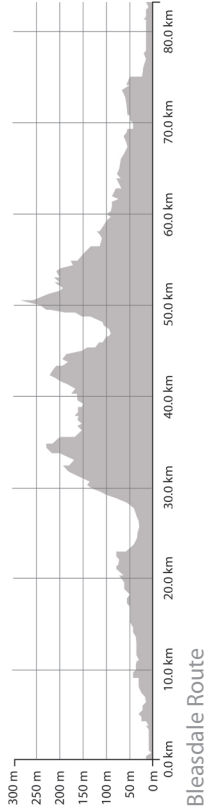
 Urban area

 Railway





ROUTE PROFILES





20



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23



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31



32

- 23 Marshalls Brow
- 24 Stricklands Lane
- 25 Liverpool Road
- 26 Cop Lane
- 27 Marlborough Drive
- 28 London Way
- 29 Warwick Road
- 30 Higher Road
- 31 Stoneygate Lane
- 32 Startifants Lane
- 33 Carwags Lane
- 34 Beacon Fell Road
- 35 Delph Lane
- 36 Carron Lane



33



34



35



36

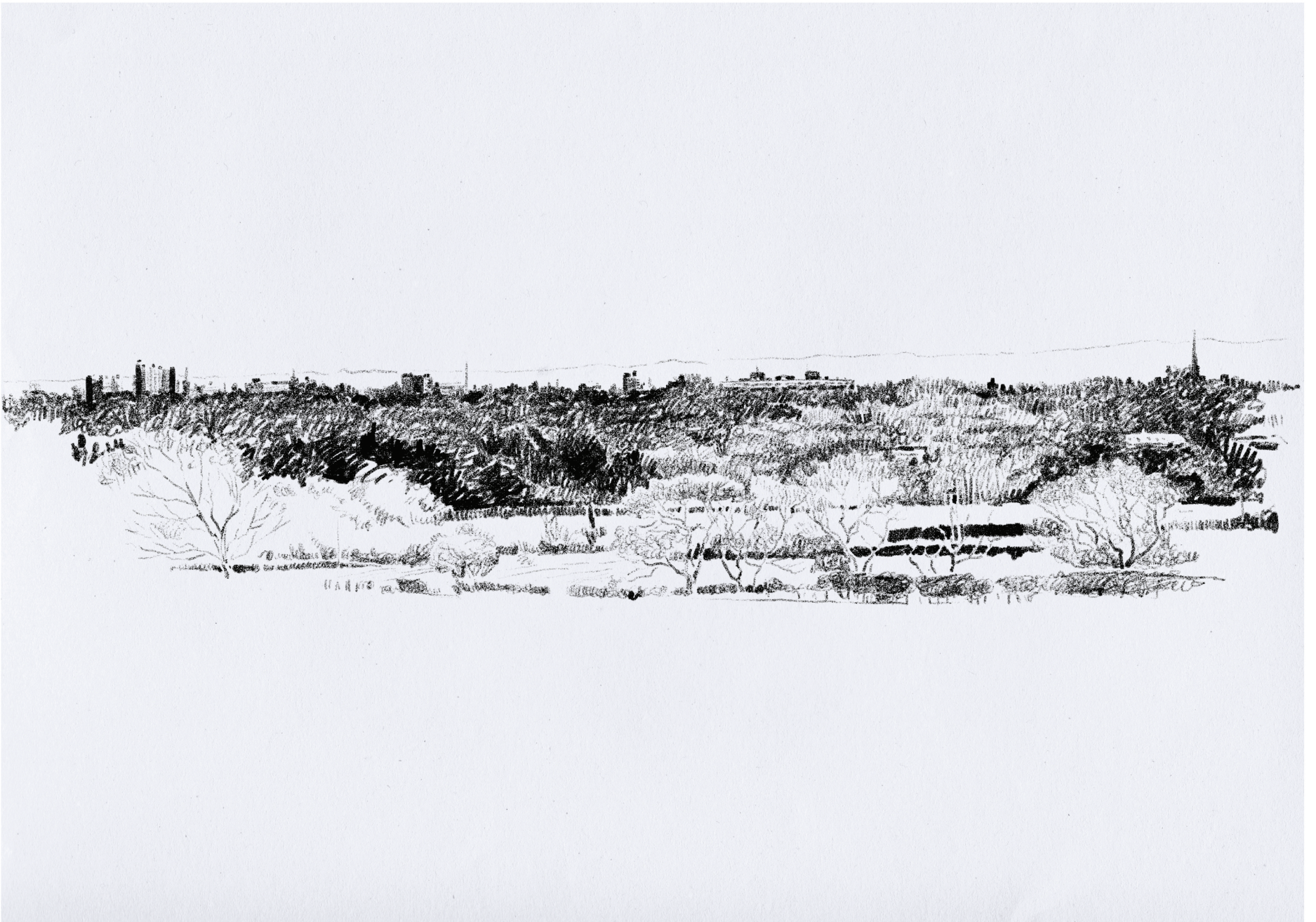
Drawings



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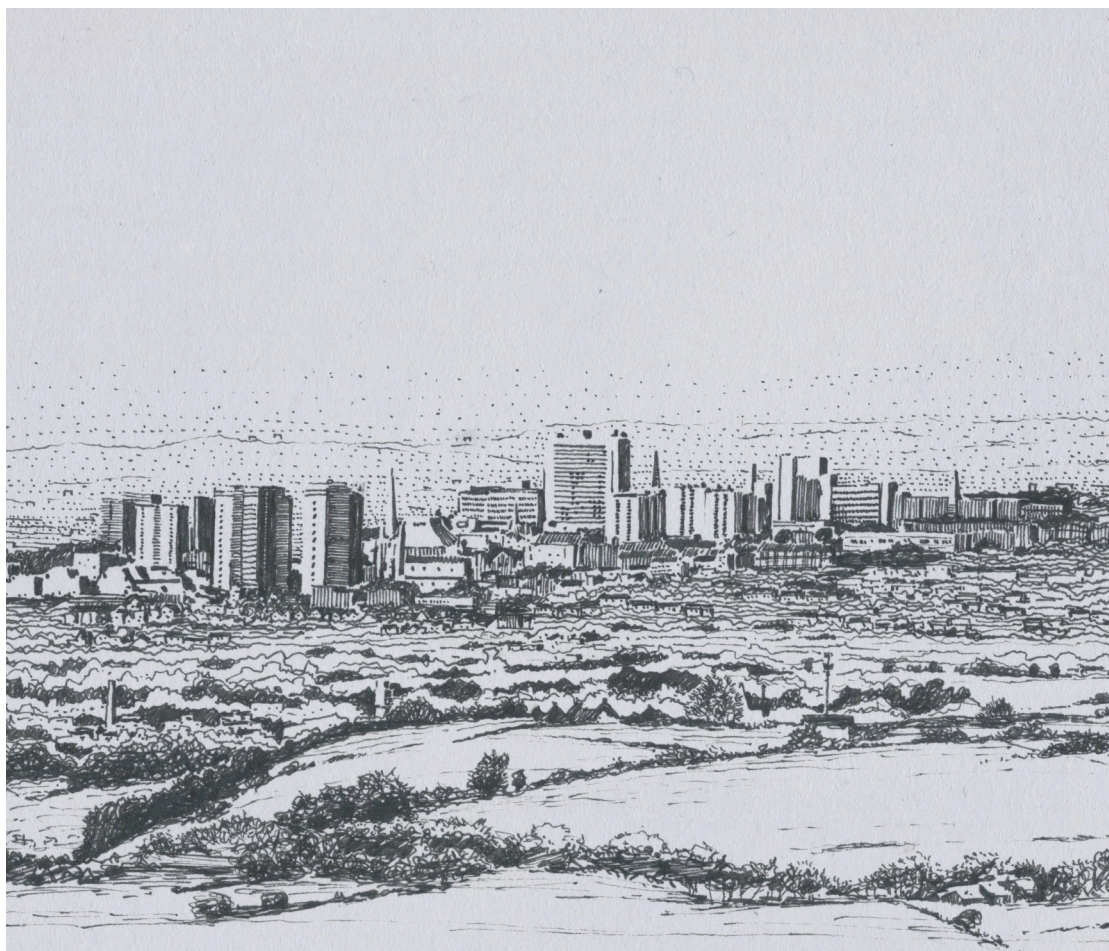


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All routes can be found for download at
www.tumblr.com/bog/lancashireroads

This project is part of The Expanded City - a three-year programme of artworks and events designed to generate debate and inform the City Deal – a national scheme, which aims to deliver new jobs and housing, by addressing strategic transport, environmental, community and cultural infrastructure challenges. Within Preston, the City Deal scheme will take place in three zones on the periphery and in the centre of the city, and includes the development of over 5,000 new homes, as well as new roads and amenities.

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www.incertainplaces.org



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