

Upper Onny Invasive Plants Project

2019

**A report of the control and survey update of the
rivers East and West Onny for Himalayan balsam.**



Rob Rowe

Funded through the Shropshire Hills AONB Conservation Fund,
Severn Trent Water Authority 'Boost for Biodiversity', Upper
Onny Wildlife Group and National Trust

UPPER ONNY INVASIVE PLANTS PROJECT REPORT 2019

Introduction

This was the fifth year of this project continuing to eradicate the known stands of invasive plant species (specifically Himalayan Balsam] along the River Onny, the Crifftin Brook and at the Bog while noting the effect of last year's work. Also to work on downstream if time permitted.

The initial survey carried out in 2015 covered both the East and West Onny to its confluence at Eaton. The East Onny was found to be free of Balsam so all control efforts have since been focused on the West Onny (approx. 18km of river). In 2016 this was extended to the Crifftin Brook and downstream through part of the Plowden Estate to Hillend Farm (approx. 6km extra). In 2017 the survey was carried on to the end of Plowden Estate at Horderley (approx. 2km extra), however due to the extent of Balsam infestation control has not reached the lower end of the survey area to date.

This year grants were obtained initially from the Shropshire Hills AONB and the Upper Onny wildlife group and then with the added input of Severn Trent Water Authority 'Boost for Biodiversity' fund we were fully financed for both 2019 and next year 2020.



Contacting owners

Most riparian owner's details were the same as last year although there were again a few errors of details and changes of ownership.

Where possible all owners were contacted, either by phone or direct contact. This was a good opportunity to explain the project and how it was progressing.

Recruiting volunteers

Having built up a list of volunteers from previous years an email was sent out, and from that response 5 different people [excluding National Trust volunteers] helped at different times and places, resulting in a total of 12 volunteer days on the upper reaches of the river.



A smaller number of practised volunteers was more practical in most cases due to there being much less HB than last year in most places. I spent several days working on my own or with one other volunteer where there was very little balsam.

Having a few experienced people able to spot the HB quickly when not in flower is most important.

If the site is obviously bad then a large team is more efficacious and to this end the National Trust again offered their help. Working on the Plowden estate we again had the benefit of 2 days with large numbers of enthusiastic National Trust volunteers and also with members of the local fishing club.



Survey and Work

Work started on the West Onny on 15th July. This was possibly a little late as vegetation was quite advanced this year. Work consisted, as usual, of pulling HB by hand. No tools were used. In most places this had worked very well. It became immediately obvious that some of the really bad areas were again much reduced from last year. The West Onny was cleared over the next 3 weeks, followed by the Crifftin Brook and the River Onny down as far as Hillend on the Plowden Estate. Richard Small and I cleared the HB at the Bog.

In late August we returned to the upper reaches of the West Onny north of Nind to clear plants that had re-grown or been missed. Although it was slightly disappointing to find HB still present after 4 years, it has largely gone in most places but there were still a few stubborn patches remaining. The main challenges were due to the difficulty of access with uneven ground and scrub by the river. It was surprising to find HB plants in certain places whereas other previously bad areas were clear.



Some of the areas at the top of the river were covered 3 times with just a few plants found each time.

On the Plowden estate we worked with NT volunteers and members of the local fishing club working downstream from opposite Hillend cottage where the HB becomes extremely dense. Over 2 days a total of 32 volunteer days were worked.



The area where we had worked in 2018 was considerably better this year but working on downstream it is still very bad with balsam extending into the wet alder woodland and forming complete blankets in places along the banks.

Volunteers were covered by my own insurance and we adhered to NE's risk assessment.

The amount of work done would not have been possible without volunteer help for which I am extremely grateful.

Summary

- This year has given an idea of the effect that four years clearance work can have.
- HB was no longer visible at what was possibly its introduction point above White Grit and there are now just 2 difficult overgrown patches before the A488 bridge.
- Through Linley estate as far as the hall were clear.
- The lower part [below Linley Estate] was good in most areas, although in two or three places [for some reason] it was still quite bad
- What also becomes clear is the difficulty of clearing certain overgrown sites and how easy it is to miss a few plants.
- There was a very large storm which bent over many plants. They then re rooted making it more difficult to pull them out cleanly.
- Very high water last winter seemed to have to have taken seed to higher levels up the bank.



There are several natural breaks along the river:

1. Above the Linley estate [parallel to the A488] to the source is nearly all small grazed fields with some woodland and gardens. This is now clear apart from 3 patches and the occasional plant.
2. Linley Estate, down as far as where grazed to just past the hall. At the moment the middle section of Linley Estate [all grazed, approx. 4 km] is virtually clear of HB.
3. Larger grazed areas and some intensive arable to just below the confluence.
4. Down to near Hillend on Plowden Estate is also a distinct marker with only relatively small areas of HB. Downstream from that point HB becomes extremely dominant for half a mile and then again is almost clear for the rest of the estate and down to Horderley, although one area looked at 2 years ago which was nearly clear then had virtually erupted with HB over 2 years. This was confirmed by the farmer a tenant of Plowden estate.

ACTION PLAN

After four years work we now have a much clearer picture of the problem. This year's work has shown how effective the last three year's clearance was and gives an idea of how much will be needed in the future. Although it is an ongoing problem, it seems it could be kept under control with a lessening input of time and money each year at least as far as Hillend, unlike other river systems (or further downstream where it is totally out of control).



Given that the seed bank of HB is viable for about 3 years and some will probably always flower and seed however carefully the river is checked, we may never be able to remove it completely but bring it to very low levels with continual vigilance.

Doing some work to clear patches of scrub where the balsam is inaccessible and the river not too high in the winter months would greatly help the clearance effort.

Work suggested for season 2019/2020

- We already have funding for next year summer work to repeat the amount of work done this year.
- Encourage participation from National Trust and Fishing club again.
- Maintain contact with landowners to thank them for their help and cooperation and encourage them to continue playing an active role in reporting and removing HB.
- Recruit and organise volunteers in June
- Clear in early July when it is most visible with a follow up a month later and again [3 times in total] on the upper reaches at the end of August.
- **Liaise with landowners or apply for grants to work this winter to clear fallen willow and scrub in key problem areas?**

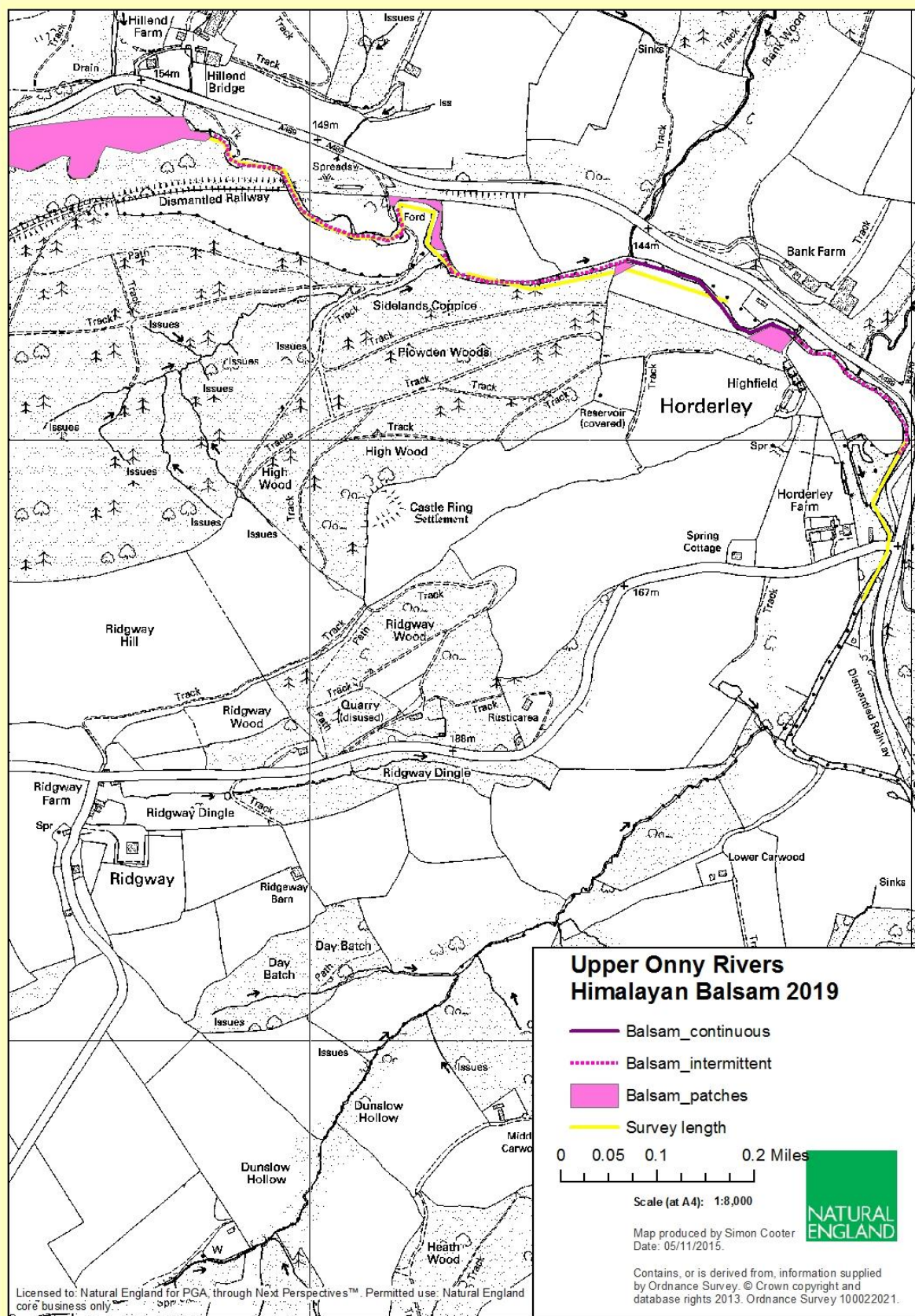
Contact list for riparian owners and volunteers has been updated.

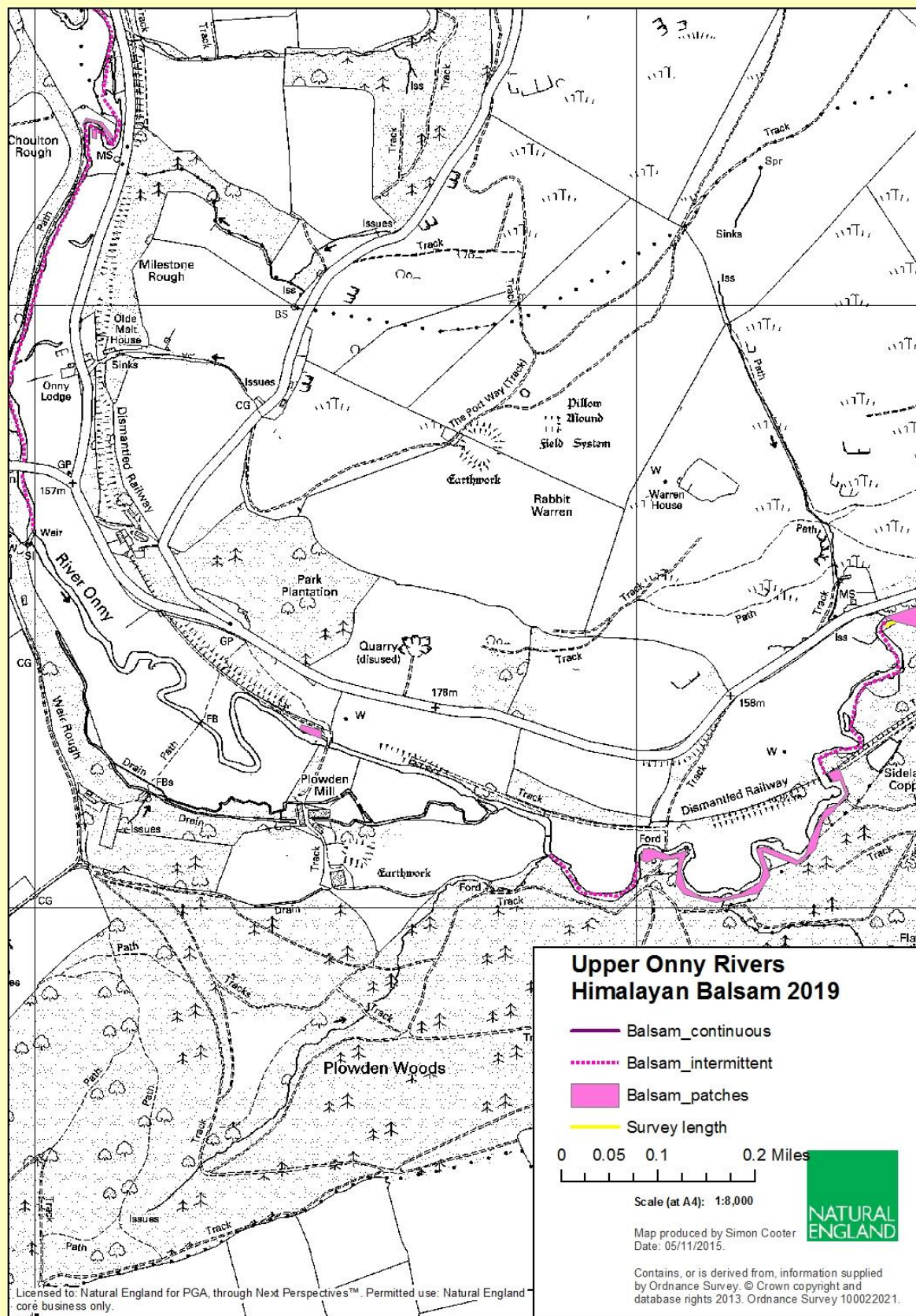
Proposed work for 2020 would be similar to and a continuation of 2019 work and is being funded by Severn Trent Water Authority 'Boost for Biodiversity'.

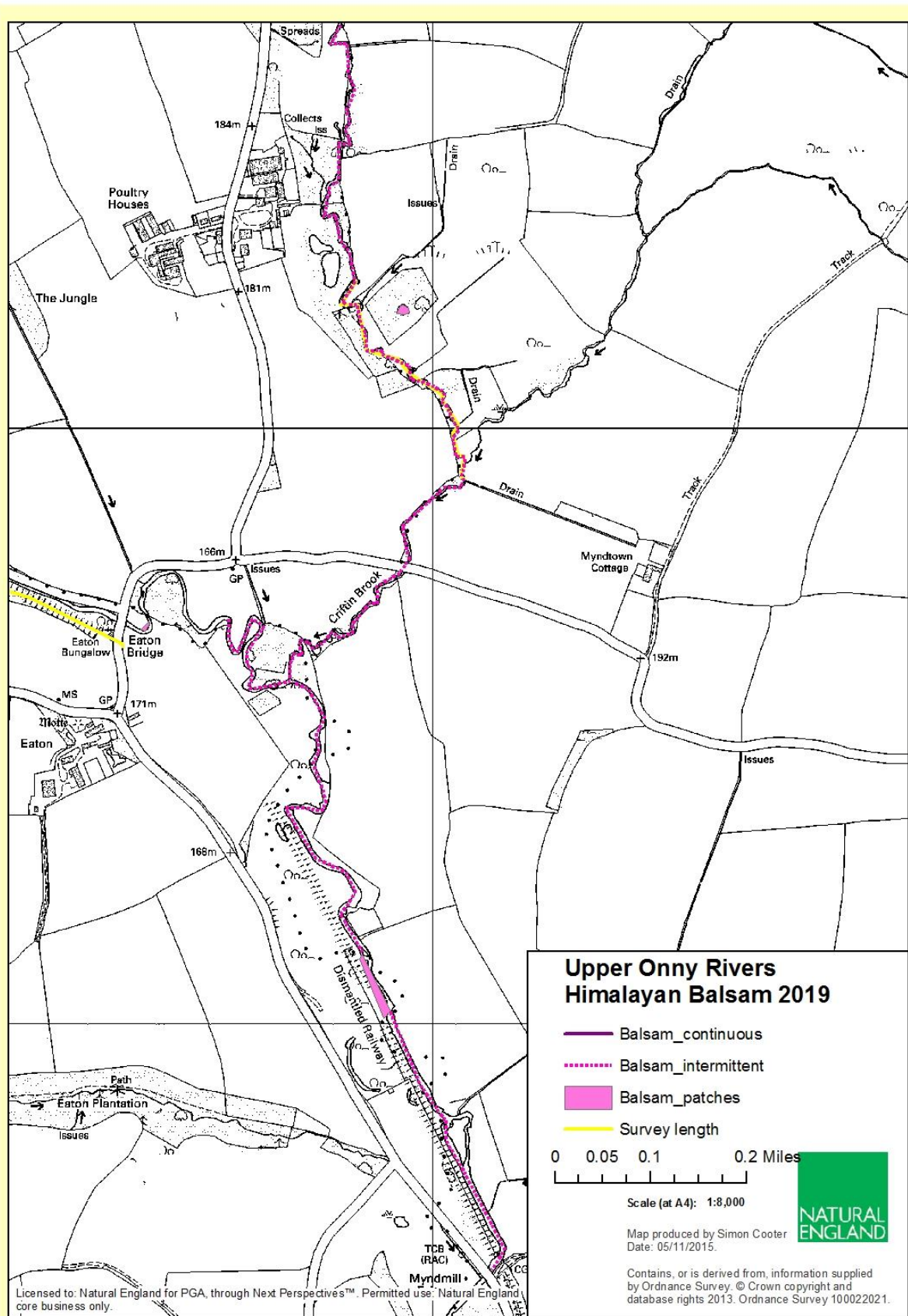
Rob Rowe October 2019

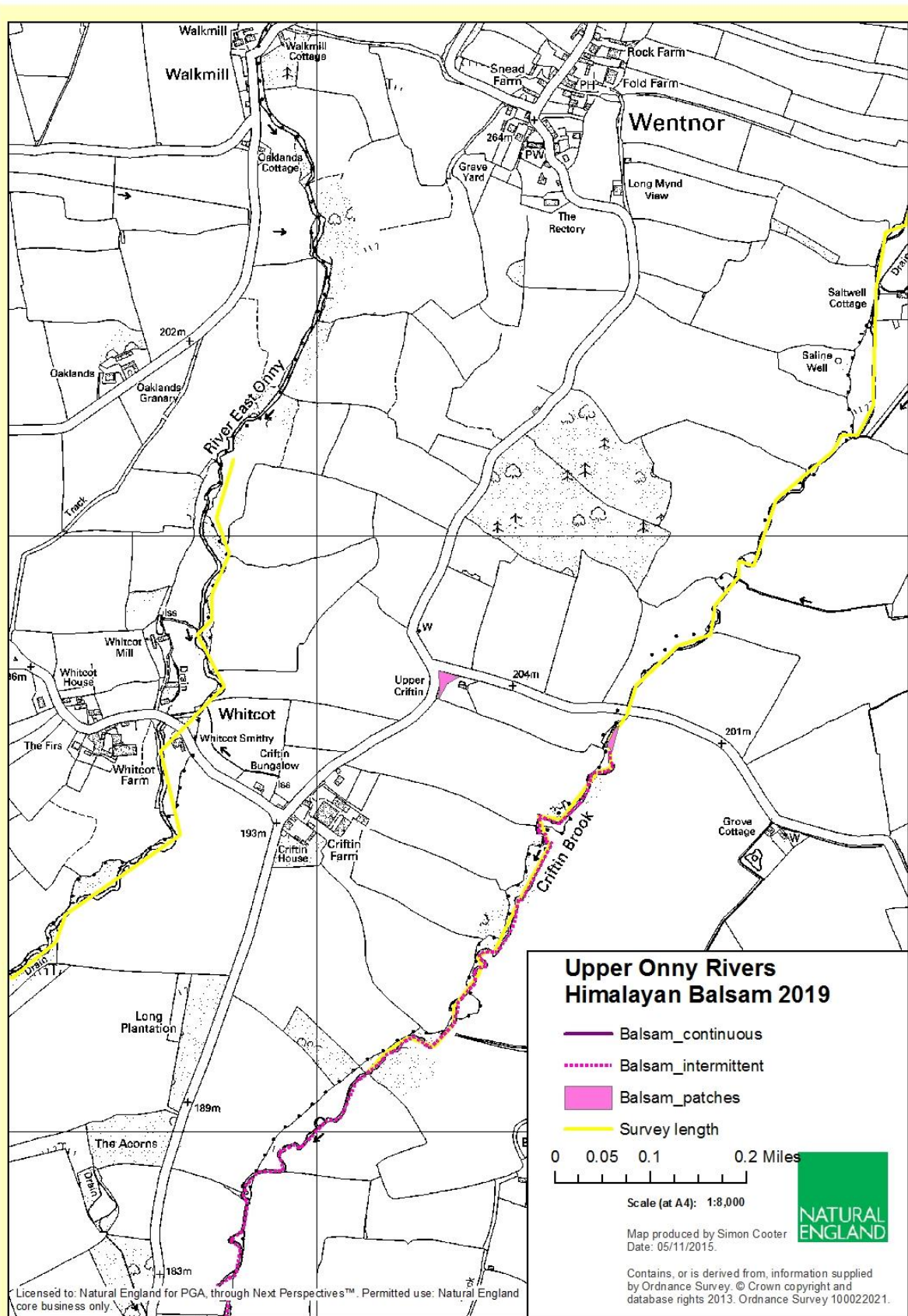
List of maps:

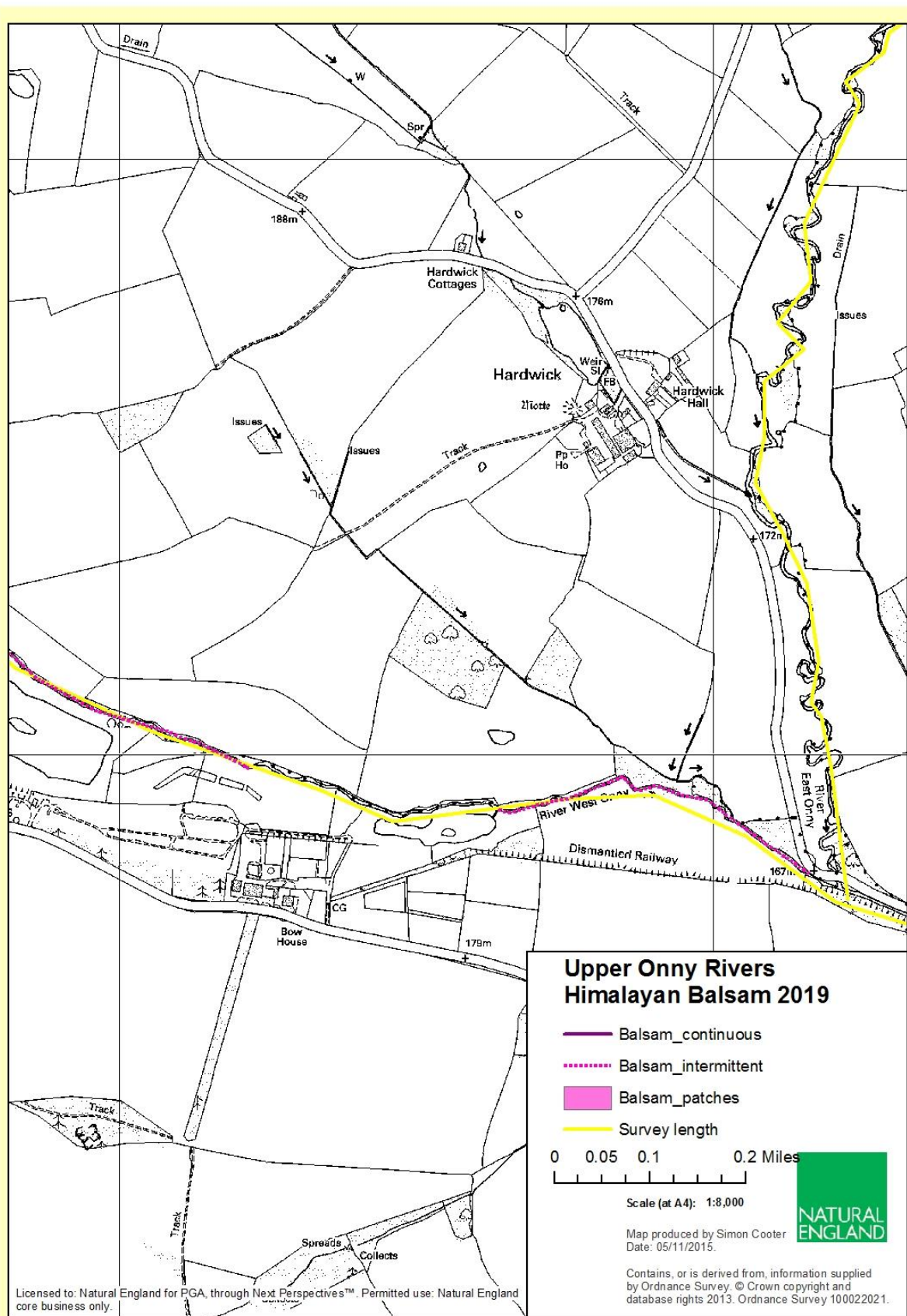
- 1 -11 - Detailed maps of Balsam coverage 2019.**
- 12 - Full balsam coverage map 2019.**
- 13 - Extent of Balsam 2015**
- 14 - Survey extent 2015-2019**

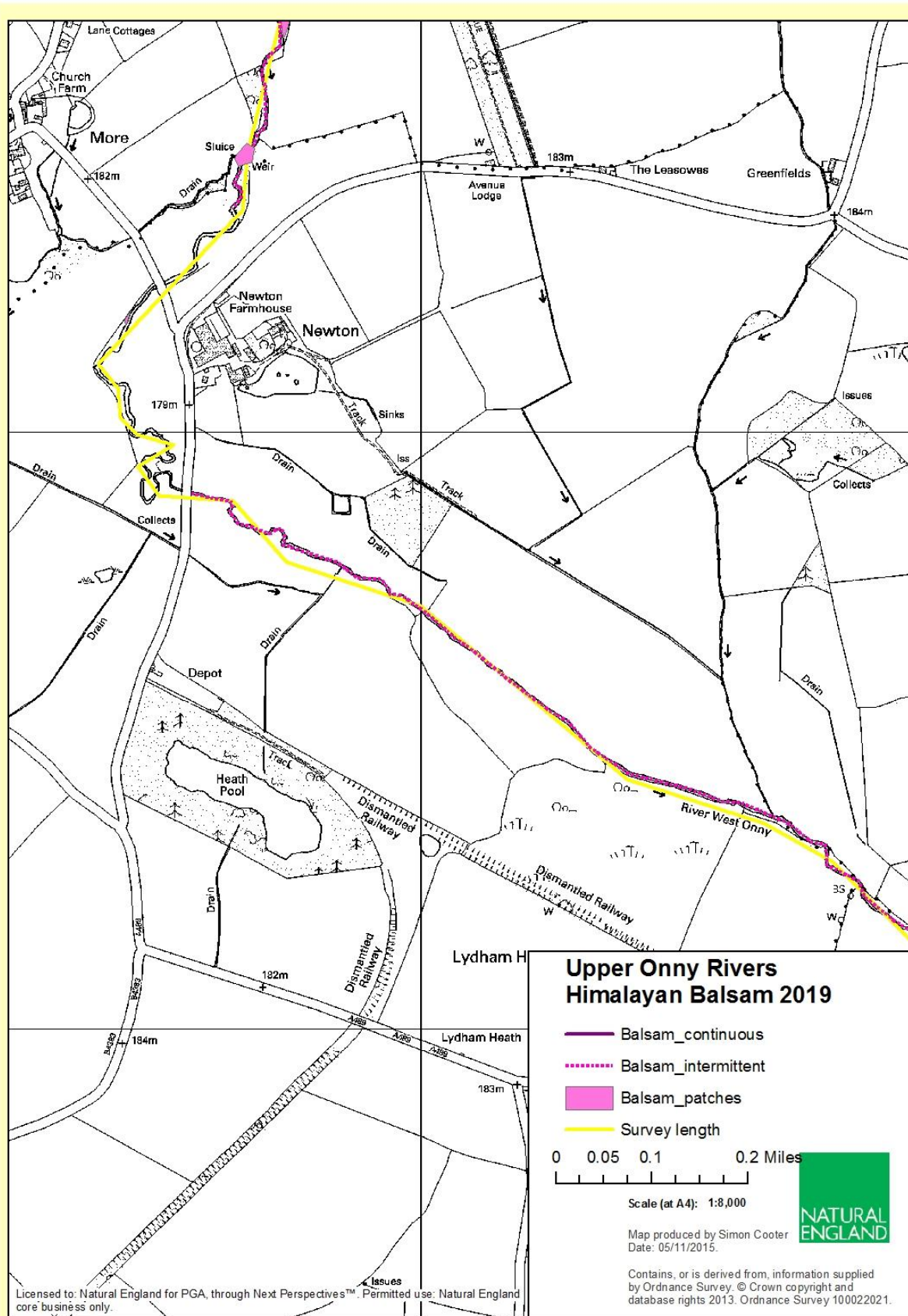


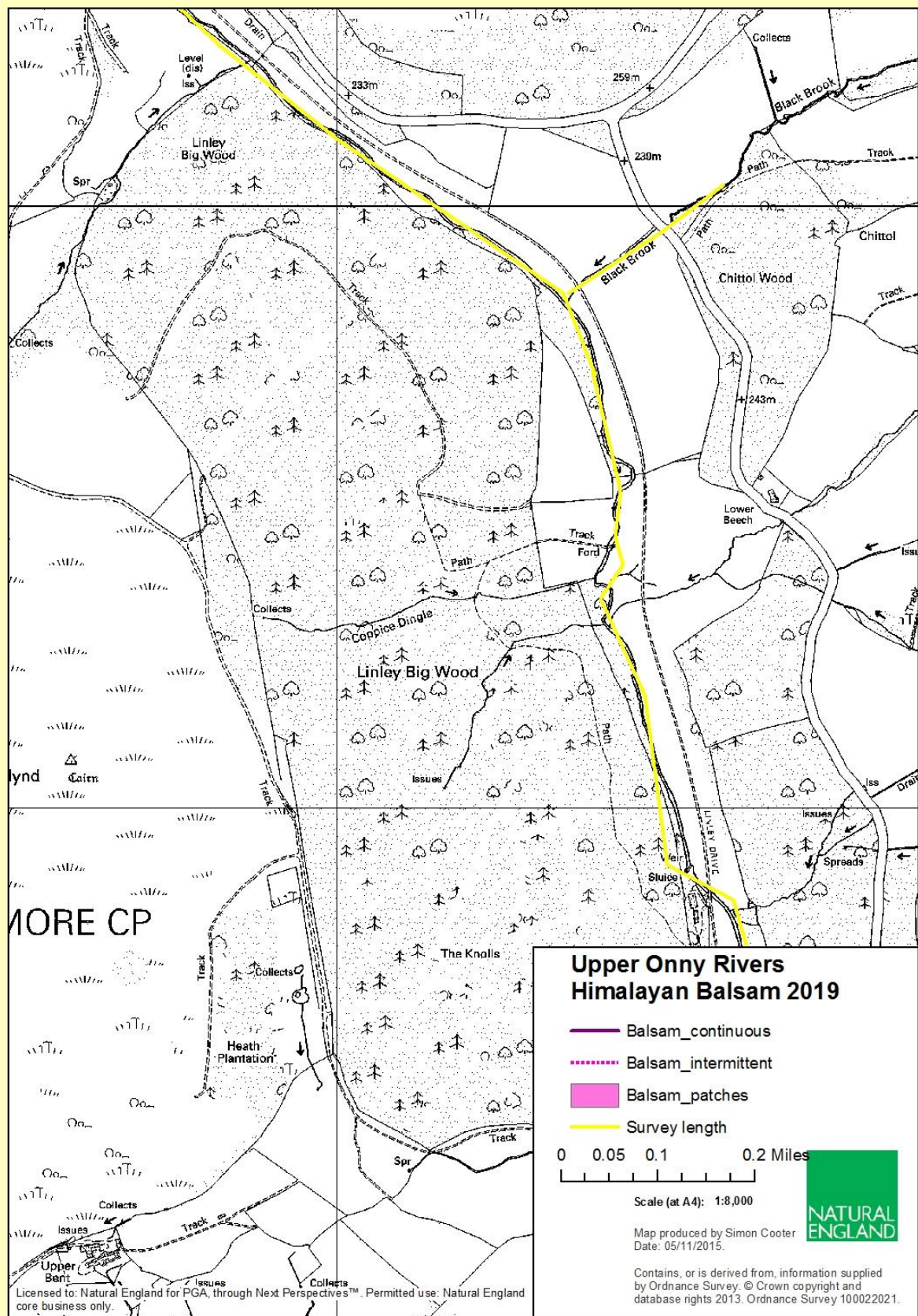


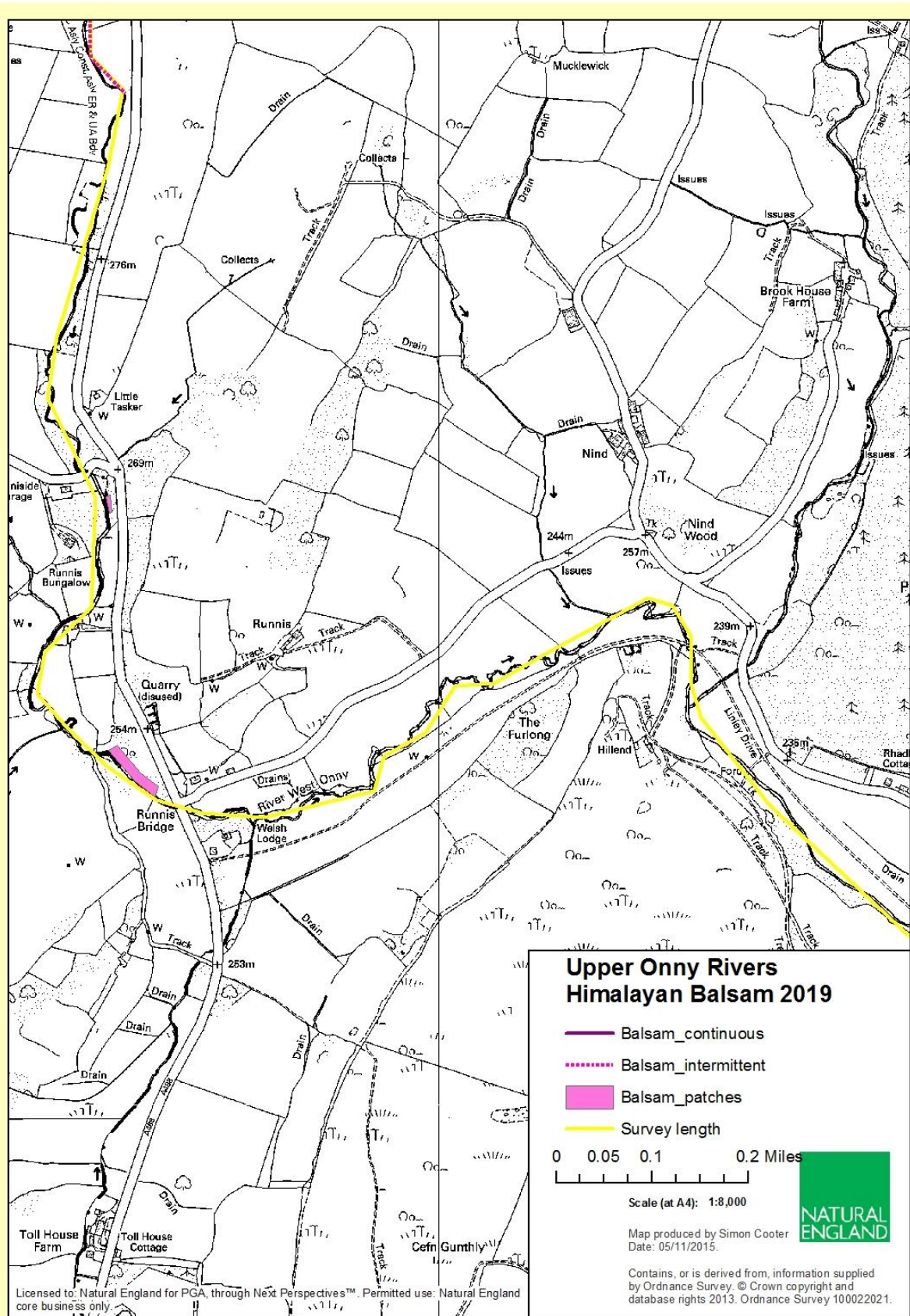


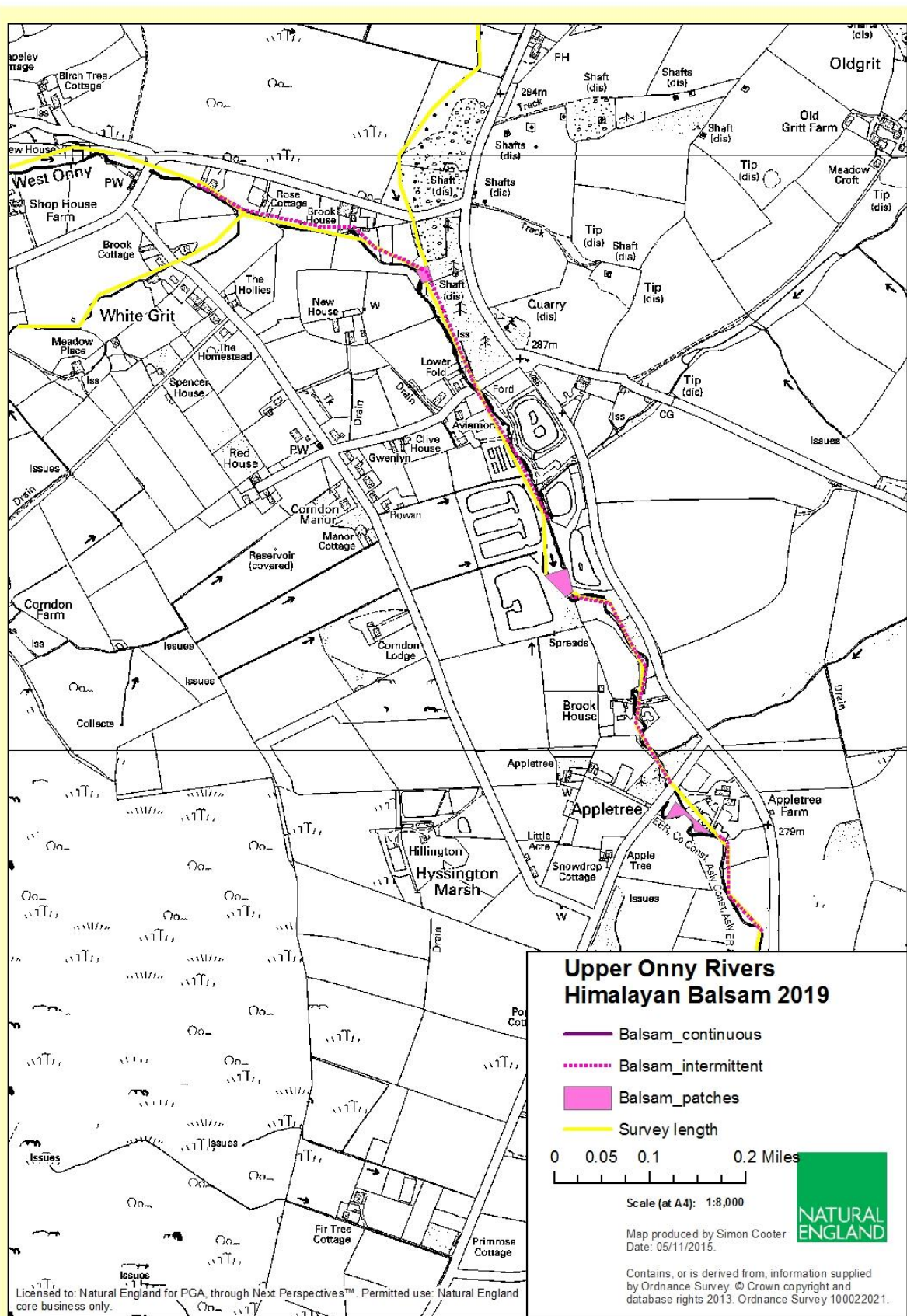


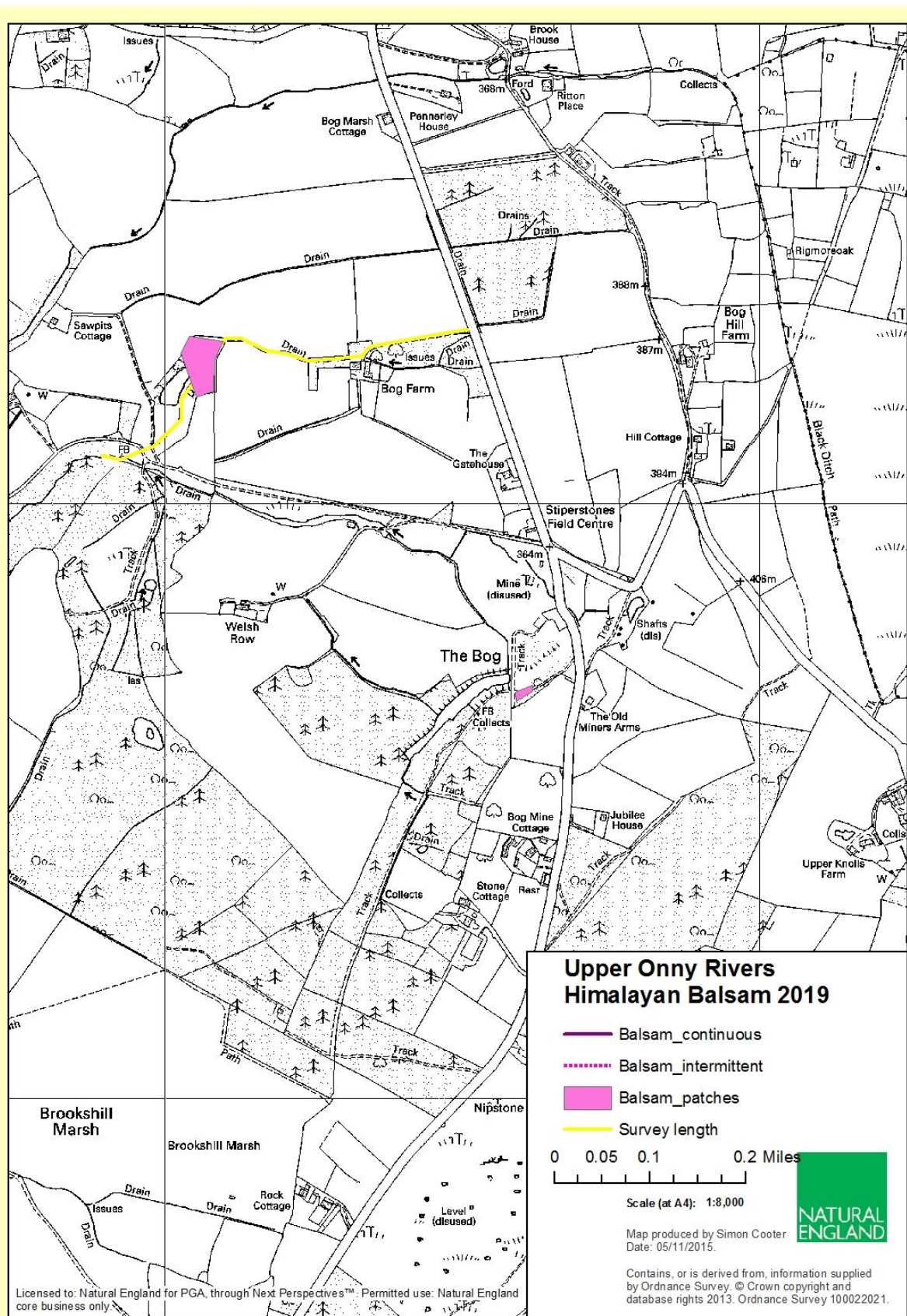


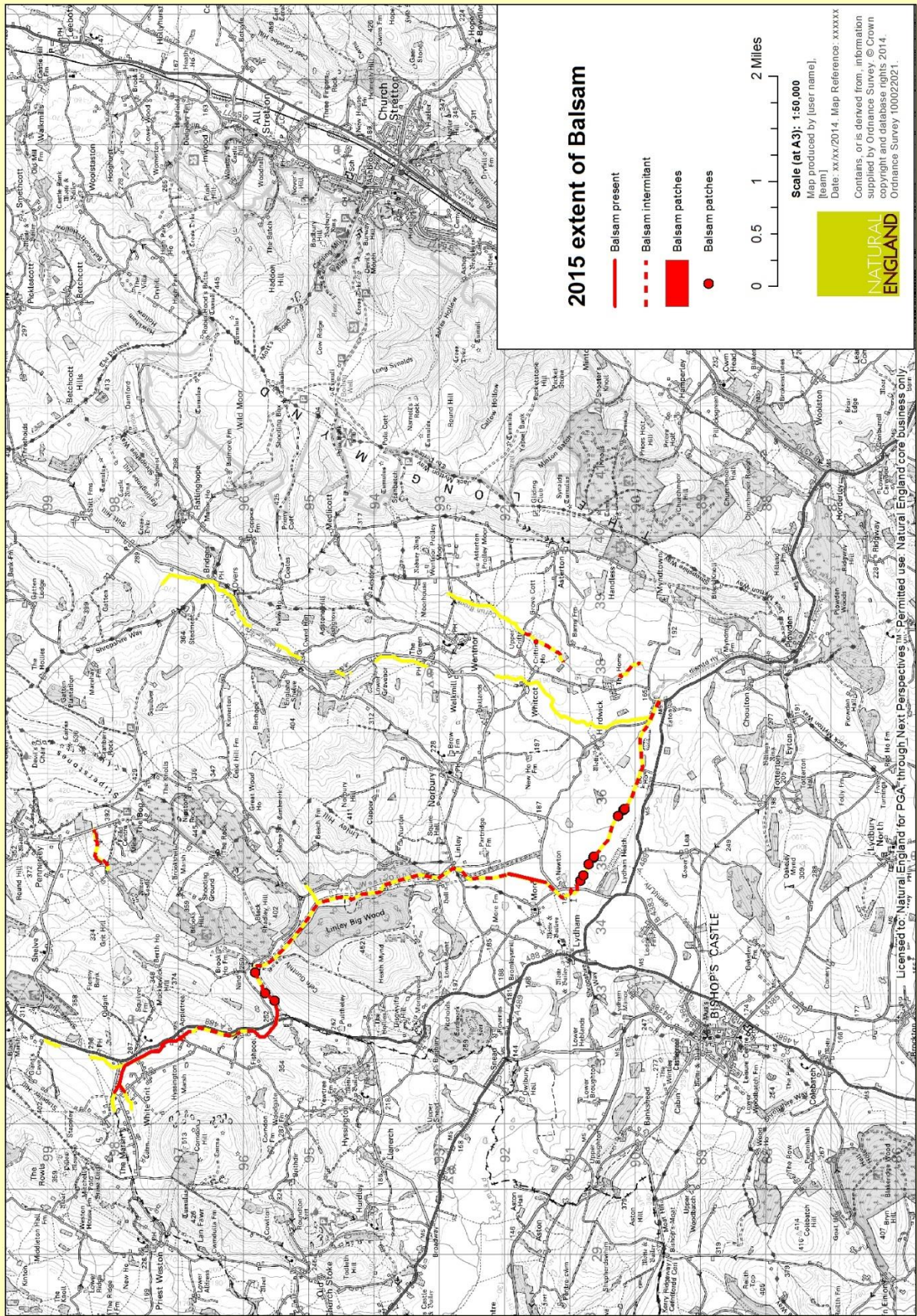




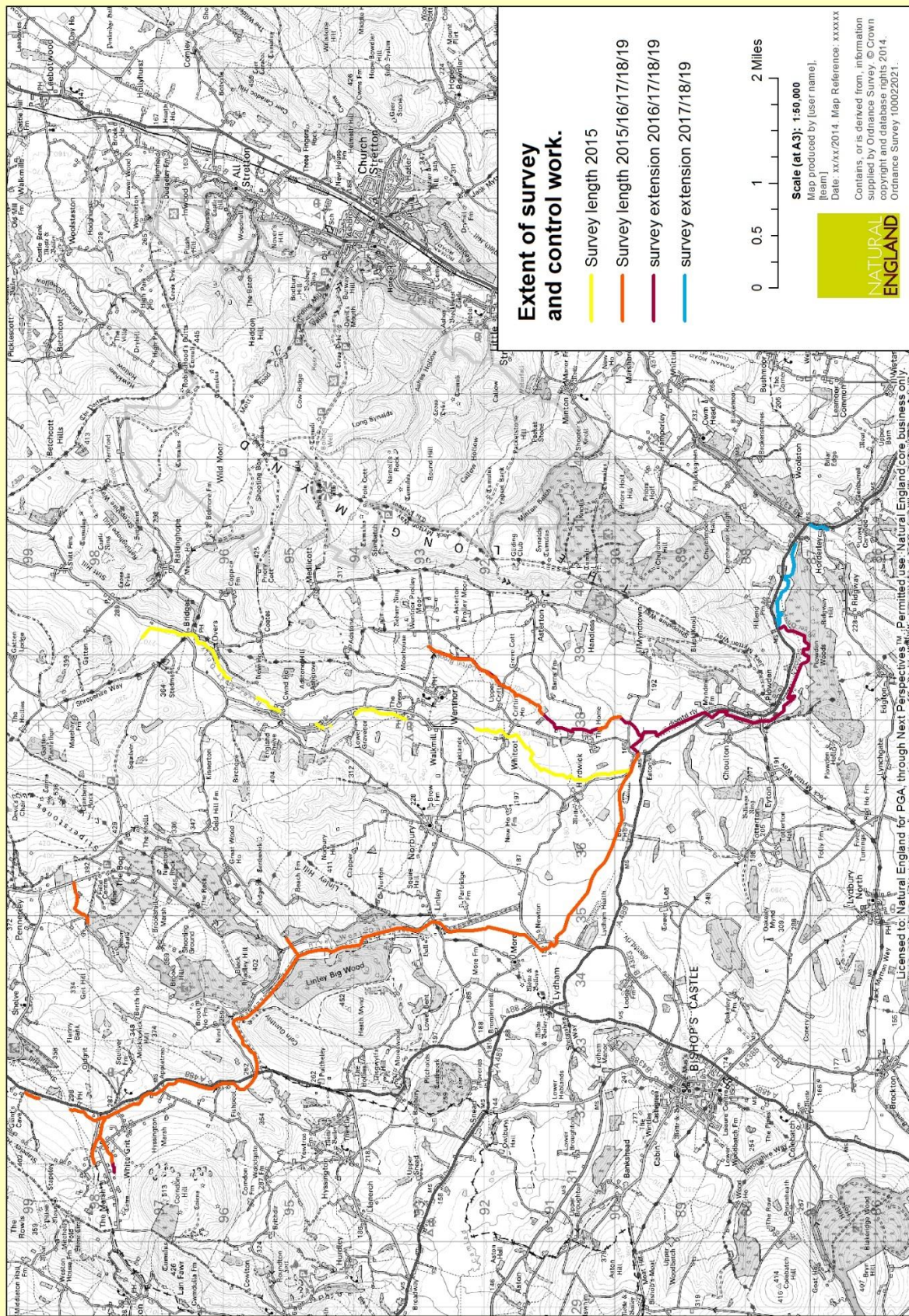








Map 13



Map 14