

Time Walk 2



Please follow the Countryside Code,

Foxton Locks to Gumley Village Circular Walk

With aspects of Water supply to the Canal. Duration approximately 2.0 h

The walk is mainly along footpaths across fields with short sections on metalled roadway or canal towpath. There are some hills and much of the route is unsuitable for wheelchair users due to stiles and narrow pathways. Stout shoes will be suitable in dry weather only and boots or wellingtons are recommended if the ground is at all wet.

Transport

Foxton Village is served by public transport from Market Harborough town centre or railway station. Bus No. 44 provides an hourly service between 7am and 7pm Mon. to Sat. Call Travel Line on 0870 608 2608 for time-table details. The Foxton Locks area can be reached on foot from Foxton Village, half a mile along the canal towpath. Car parking Cars may be left at the Gumley Road car park near to the top of the Locks. This is pay and display £1.50 (please take care not to leave valuables on display)

Picture, Bridge 61 over the bottom lock. you need to cross over this.



The Walk

From the top car park follow the footpath to the summit level of the canal and continue on the towpath down the side of the locks past the Top Lock Cottage. This has recently been restored and operates as a coffee shop with covered and open air picnic areas. Continue down the locks until you come to Bridge 61 just above the Bottom Lock. Cross the canal in order to walk over the bridge.

The Foxton Locks inn occupies former canal company buildings which have recently undergone a major refurbishment. Refreshments can be obtained here and also at Bridge 61 on the opposite side of the locks. **Visit the Museum** half way up the flight where information regarding the canals may be obtained and where a working model of the Incline Plane Lift, which was built just over 100 years ago to bypass the locks, may be inspected.

Grand Junction Canal Company Marker post. These were used to mark the extent of waterway property, instead of a fence.



Bridge 61 allows an ancient bridleway from Foxton to Gumley to cross the canal.

The water course in the bottom of the valley is the Foxton Brook and although the stream passes beneath the canal through a culvert at the canal junction, just below the locks, the water can be diverted to feed the canal via an elaborate system of sluices and artificial channel installed when the locks were built around 1811. This system had to be constructed because the line of the canal was changed from that originally planned. Instead of crossing the brook on the same level, higher up the valley, so that a simple sluice arrangement would have allowed surplus water to feed the canal, the channel as built crosses above the brook further down the valley so an artificial channel had to be made to bring the required water into the canal. This channel can be seen to your left as you continue on the bridleway towards Gumley and has a small bridge to allow the farmer access to the land on the far side. You may wish to look for some of the Grand Junction Canal Company cast iron boundary posts in the vicinity of the channel and works. These were put in at the end of the 19th C. to mark the extent of the land and facilities that company acquired with the purchase of both the LNU and original GU canal companies in 1894. The Leicestershire & Northamptonshire Union Canal Company had built the canal from Leicester to Market Harborough and the Grand Union Canal Company had then built the connecting canal between the LNU and the Grand Junction Canal from London to Birmingham which included the Foxton Locks flight.



Picture, Sluice gate and feeder stream to control the supply of water to the canal.

The sluice arrangement which allows water from the brook to enter the artificial feeder channel can be seen in the hedgerow bushes at the head of the channel. The facilities are now controlled by British Waterways and the area of these interesting historic works has been included in the Grand Union Canal Conservation Area which protects both the former LNU and old Grand Union lines of canal. Foxton Brook itself is culverted across the field in the valley bottom until it reappears in the grounds of the Bottom Lock Cottage before passing through a further culvert under the canal on its way to Foxton Village.

Not far from the head of the feeder channel, but a little further up the valley side, on your left as you continue along the bridleway is the spot where the original line of canal was to have entered a tunnel instead of having the flight of locks which were ultimately built. These plans were changed when the LNU company ran short of money by the time construction had reached Debdale, over a mile from Foxton, in 1797 and it was some years later that the canal was continued on a different route through Foxton Village, to reach Market Harborough in 1809. The locks were then built to allow a connection to be made between this canal and further south.

The bridleway continues across the fields and through gates and stiles. Cross the first road and when you come to the second road turn left and follow the road for about 150 metres.

Just after the white railed bridge a signpost will be seen on the right indicating a bridleway to Laughton. Turn on to this and then the bridleway turns quickly left into a field.

Follow this for about another 100 metres when you will see yellow marker post at the edge of a small plantation. Turn right where a footpath immediately crosses a small brook by means of a simple wooden footbridge and a stile.

Continue across the field up the hill towards Gumley village. The line of the footpath is indistinct across the field. Walk forward under the power lines then follow their line along the top of the ridge keeping them on your right. There is a yellow marker post on the brow of the hill. A few metres to the right of this post is a gate by the top pylon leading into a narrow lane. Follow this path to the main street of the village. If you need refreshment and toilets turn right for The Bell Inn.

Picture: the footpath continues through the trees and over the brook, look out for the marker posts.



To continue the walk turn left up the village street.

The 'Engine House' held a saw mill and electricity station for Gumley Hall.

About 300 metres up the hill, enter the drive leading towards the church. Near the entrance to the driveway you will see the former stable block and clock tower of Gumley Hall, which have recently been converted to country residences.

When you reach the village street, you will see this collection of street furniture, which is possibly unique in grouping nearly every type in one place.



Gumley Hall c1900

The hall itself was situated to the right of the church driveway and the cleared areas to either side once formed the imposing carriageway down the entrance. For many years the hall was the seat of Joseph Cradock who was very influential in the affairs of the Leicestershire & Northamptonshire Union Canal Company when the canal was being built. Sadly the imposing hall fell into disrepair, after use as a special forces training centre during the second world war, and was demolished some 50 years ago.



Gumley Hall Stables and clock tower.

In Gumley churchyard can be found gravestones of the Dobson Family who kept the Debdale Wharf Inn near the canal. This inn was situated in a farmhouse on the lane between Smeeton Westerby and the Leicester to Harborough Turnpike and was in operation during the early part of the 19th C. The gravestone of John Frisby Bentley can also be seen, close to those of the Bentley family into which he married. John Frisby Bentley was closely associated with the Union Canals both at Welford and Foxton and ended his life as Toll Clerk at Foxton Locks.



Gravestones of the Dobson Family who kept the Debdale Wharf Inn near the canal

Return to the entrance to the churchyard, pass through the gate and follow the footpath by the church, and then go straight ahead across the field where another gate leads on to the road. Turn right and follow the road to the junction with Debdale Lane, signed to Debdale Wharf, the former canal wharf. Ignore the footpath which goes off to the right at the junction and instead continue for a short distance down the lane towards Debdale until you see another footpath crossing the road. Take the footpath to the right and continue across the field into the valley and ignore the other arm of this footpath which clings to the edge of Gumley Wood on your right and which leads back to the village.

In the valley you will see a newly built farmhouse in modern style and the footpath passes over stiles and through the farm yard. Continue two thirds of the way across the next field until you see a gate on your right through the hedge. The yellow post is hidden in the hedge. Climb over and keep on towards the canal with the hedge on your left, denoted by the usual bright yellow posts. until you arrive at a footbridge over the canal which you need to cross.

The originally intended line of the LNU canal would have passed nearer to the farmhouse you have just passed before entering the planned tunnel. Another scheme to avoid having to build this tunnel was proposed by canal engineer James Barnes after the canal had temporarily ended at Debdale. This would have seen a series of locks built on the hillside over towards Gumley Wood and the arm to Market Harborough would have passed through Foxton Village just below the church on a higher contour than the present canal.

Having crossed the canal over the footbridge turn right along the towpath and you will shortly arrive back at the canal junction. Go across the turnover bridge (Rainbow Bridge) to reach Foxton Locks with the various facilities for refreshments.



Rainbow Bridge (evening in October). The lights of the pubs are a welcome sight after a good walk.