



Rutland Discovery Trails

4. The Vale Trail

One of Rutland's secrets is the serene Vale of Catmose. But what exactly is it? We know about Catmose College, Catmos Street and the HQ of Rutland County Council at Catmose but where is this mysterious Vale?

In fact it lies at the everyday heart of Rutland with Oakham marking its course. Extending from the River Gwash below Manton it runs northwards beyond Oakham to the Rutland border at Teigh. Mostly it is the valley of the River Eye which starts near Cold Overton on the high ground and wends its way through Langham to Stapleford and Melton Mowbray.

On either side of the valley is high land. The clay uplands to the west provide excellent views over the whole County whilst to the east the sharp Burley – Cottesmore ridge overlooks the entire Vale giving fine views of it which changes all the time.

The villages of the Vale tend to be through routes rather than pondering, philosophical places – Barleythorpe, Langham, Whissendine, Teigh and Ashwell. To some extent the creation of Rutland Water has truncated the Vale in the south. Once it joined the Gwash Valley as it broadened between the limestone upland to the north and the ridge and valleys to the south. How far the Vale may have been considered to extend in this direction we may never know.

Long before the days of Rutland Water there was a plan to link the Oakham-Melton Canal with a Stamford Canal which would have opened up the whole Vale to outside connections. But this came to nothing and, indeed, the Oakham-Melton canal itself foundered before the middle of the 19th century so that it was the railway which made the complete link.

Travelling round the Vale you can still see traces of the Oakham-Melton canal. From Oakham, down Ashwell Road you may notice the old canal. There is a good stretch on the turn off to Langham where you can walk. Not far away the Canal crosses the road at the Cottesmore Hunt Kennels. Its sinuous course skirts Rutland Railway Museum, takes a very wide bend to the old wharf below Market Overton thence south of Edmondthorpe to Whissendine Station and through Stapleford Park. Canal and railway, now close companions in shared decline, were once fierce rival in the Vale.



Your Vale Trail should start in Oakham and continue north west to *Barleythorpe*.

This 'almost' estate village was once the home of the famous Yellow Earl – Hugh Lowther, 5th Earl of Lonsdale (1857 – 1944) who resided at Barleythorpe Hall. He established a fine stud in the village, a tradition still carried on today. The Yellow Earl had a distinctive yellow livery and it is thought that when he was President of the AA he encouraged the choice of this colour for the AA. A great sportsman, fox-hunter, explorer, buffalo hunter, he became a legend in his own lifetime. He entertained many famous celebrities and royalty at Barleythorpe and once fought a scuffle over Lily Langtry, the renowned actress (and mistress of the Prince of Wales, the future Edward VII).



Over the roundabout to *Langham* and right into the village,

once home to Ruddle's Brewery who produced beer with a unique flavour due to using the Langham well water. Visit Rutland Vintners, wine merchant on Burley Road, and see an excellent selection of wines, beers and spirits, housed in a charming rural setting of thatch and stone. Wander down to the stream, St Peter and Paul stands impressively with a splendid south side, a majestic spire completed in 1350 and a wonderful perpendicular elevation mainly of the 15th century. Simon de Langham, Abbot of Westminster, Archbishop of Canterbury and Chancellor of England is believed to have been born in the Village about 1310.



Back on the main road going north, take a right turn for *Whissendine*, a big village with three different sections, each probably representing the manors which existed centuries ago. St Andrew's has been called 'large but beautiful' by some and 'the finest 14th century tower in the county' by others. Look inside for the 13th century roof line and the carved figures supporting it. The greatest possession is the 16th century screen from St John's College, Cambridge. The interior is reminiscent of the great wool churches of East Anglia. The village has two pubs, a bistro and a working windmill, there are also some pleasant walks in the fields around.

Continue out of the village towards *Teigh*, going over the railway line and right at the *Ashwell cross roads* (we will come back to Ashwell later).

You will begin to get the real feeling of the Vale as a separate sub-region. Old and new cottages gather round Holy Trinity church in Teigh make an attractive scene, this church and the Old Rectory were used in the 1995 BBC adaptation of *Pride and Prejudice* as Mr Collins's house and Hunsford church. Inside the church you will find a surprise. You seem to have entered a College Chapel with tiers of wooden pews facing each other and at the west end a high pulpit flanked by reading desks. Above is a mock window with a country view painted on it. The church was rebuilt in 1782 like this by the Fourth Earl of Harborough of Stapleford Park, who was an avid church builder.



Follow your tracks south, back to Ashwell which has its ancient spring with an inscription worth finding (this is quite hidden under tree cover where the road bends and Langham road joins). A little brook flows through the village and there are some pleasant walks along it and past converted buildings such as the Old School. Crumbling, lichen-covered walls, lovely gardens and the occasional horse paddock add interest. St Mary's was drastically restored in 1851 both inside and out. Some say the restoration was the most striking in Rutland. Look for the faces of men and animals around the windows in the ballflower carving. Inside find the cross-legged knight, the effigy of a priest and the husband and wife immortalised with their faithful dog on a marble slab. In the churchyard is the grave of Rev. James Adams, the first clergyman to be awarded the Victoria Cross.

Back to Oakham you will pass 'Rutland Village' rural retail park with a garden centre, farm shop and much more. Further along you will pass Kimball Close on your right, the old site of the Cottesmore Hunt Kennels, now houses, and then Ashwell Prison on your left. Keep your eyes open for signs of the Canal to the left and right. Perhaps you can try putting your mind back centuries when the Vale would be woodland and your only guiding landmark All Saints spire. You have travelled a well-beaten trail but it has been in an area which, though in our midst, we bother with too little.

Useful Contact Information:

Rutland Railway Museum, Cottesmore: 01572 813203

Explore Rutland's industrial heritage, you can see a number of steam and diesel locomotives, wagons and machinery, plus there is a café on site. Open Tuesdays, Thursdays & Sundays

Rutland Vintners, wine merchant: 01572 755 040

Stocking an extensive range of fine wines, quality spirits, liqueurs, beers, ciders and minerals. www.wineshoprutland.co.uk

The White Lion, Whissendine: 01664 474233

Situated in the heart of the village, this is much more than the average local pub as it boasts an atmospheric Indian restaurant.

Rutland Village, near Ashwell: 01572 723583

A prestigious rural retail park with a garden centre, café, farm shop, clothing stores, pet shops plus much more. www.rutlandvillage.co.uk.

