

RUTLAND HERITAGE TRAIL #7

CANALS & CANTERBURY,

DISTANCE: Approximately 11 miles (8½ if you take the shortcut)

START & FINISH: Market Overton. Parking along Thistleton (Teigh) Road along from parish church and The Black Bull.

TERRAIN: Mostly a mixture of footpaths and bridleways across fields and stretches of metalled road.

REFRESHMENTS: Market Overton – The Black Bull, 01572 767677

Whissendine – The White Lion, 01664 474233

Langham – The Wheatsheaf, 01572 869105

MAP DETAILS: This route is covered by the Ordnance Survey Explorer Series Numbers 15 (234) and 247.

ALLOW AROUND FIVE HOURS FOR THIS DELIGHTFUL CIRCULAR WALK THAT TAKES IN THE VILLAGES OF MARKET OVERTON, WHISSENDINE AND LANGHAM; ALLOW LONGER IF YOU WANT TO EXPLORE THE VILLAGES.

In the north-west of Rutland, close to the border with Leicestershire, a 200 year-old waterway winds its way across the countryside. Boats no longer travel along the Oakham to Melton canal – parts of it have dried up and been filled in – but its memory lingers on in the sudden appearance of rectangular stretches of water across the fields and the old buildings and canal names that survive in the local villages.

Close by sits the ancient village of Langham, whose lands and church were once the interest and property of the great Abbey of Westminster. The village was the birthplace of Simon de Langham, the 14th century Archbishop of Canterbury who, as first a monk and then abbot of Westminster Abbey, is said to have helped rebuild the Langham church.

THE WALK

Start in Market Overton near The Black Bull pub and parish church. Walk out of the village, downhill on the Teigh Road. After ½ mile you will see a group of buildings on the left which were once part of the canal wharf. Continue, following the zigzag of the road until you reach a junction. Right is the small village of Teigh. The churchyard of Holy Trinity church is the burial place of Anthony Jenkinson, the 16th century explorer and first Englishman to visit central Asia. The Old Rectory was the filming location for Mr Collins' parsonage in the BBC's 1995 *Pride & Prejudice*.

Turn left at the junction and then almost immediately take the bridleway marked on the right. This wide green lane and farm track leads to Whissendine. Walk until you reach an unmanned level crossing. Cross with care and go through a gate into the gardens of Teigh Gatehouse. Go out through a gate with brick pillars and continue along the lane – now a slightly firmer surface. As you walk the two or so miles to its end, look out for a WWII pillbox and then, peeping through the hedges on the right, the earthworks of a medieval moated site. This may be the remains of the 14th century Moorhall manor.

At the end of the lane, turn left onto the road and walk into the village. You will come to a junction with Main Street alongside the parish church. Turn left here (a right turn will bring you into Whissendine and refreshment possibilities!) and follow the road out of the village. Look for a bridleway on the right as the road bends sharply to the left.



WATER & WESTMINSTER



If you wish you could take a short cut now. Follow the road to Ashwell, missing out Langham and reducing the length of the walk by about 2½ miles. You can rejoin the main walk at Ashwell crossroads.

Walking along the left-hand side of the field, continue as far as a field entrance where the path swaps to the left-hand side of the hedge line. Carry on to the end of this second field to where a bridgeway is signposted both to your left and right.

Turn right following the edge of the field, through another field entrance until you spot a double stile in the hedge line to your left. Cross over this and walk straight ahead, with the hedge line to your left. The spire of Langham church is now visible ahead.

Follow the grass path and cross a footbridge to another hedge line. Now follow the footpath round to the right until you reach a footbridge. Turn left here, over the bridge and head towards the right-hand edge of the field and then towards the church spire. Soon you will reach a kissing gate that leads you onto a clear footpath around the edge of the field and through a metal gate down into Langham, onto Manor Lane.

Turn right here, and then left into Orchard Road. This emerges into Well Street, turn left and walk to the church of St. Peter and St. Paul. Pass this, taking a footpath to the right that leads out onto Burley Road. Now turn left and look for a footpath to the left.

Walk a short way along this tarmac path, until you reach a footpath marked to the left into the field alongside the sewage works. Follow this footpath around the edge of the field until you come to a footbridge on the left. Cross this and turn right. Continue to a marker post and then head straight across the field to reach a kissing gate and Ashwell Road.

Turn right here and follow this quiet road into the village and a junction. Turn left here and look for the well on your left before continuing to the crossroads. The stone structure encasing the well was erected by the Reverend William Butterfield, a Victorian vicar of Ashwell, possibly on the site of a medieval well. Look out for the inscription above the arch.

At the crossroads (rejoin the walk here if you have taken the short-cut), turn right and continue until you reach Braeside on the left. Here a narrow kissing gate takes you onto a footpath – the final stretch across fields back to Market Overton.

'The Wharf'

This group of buildings was once part of the Market Overton canal wharf. At the beginning of the 19th century they consisted of a private house, stables, workers' cottages, a three-storey warehouse (which has been converted into cottages) and a maltings. They belonged to Thomas Bennet, a local farmer, beer retailer, maltster, coal and corn merchant.

Oakham to Melton Canal

Built at the end of the 1700s, the 15½ mile long Oakham to Melton canal opened in 1802. Starting in Melton Mowbray, the canal wound its way eastwards across the countryside, round Saxby and Stapleford Park, close by the village of Edmondthorpe and then to Market Overton. There it turned southward, passing through Barrow and Ashwell to come to an end in Oakham, where Wharflands House (part of Oakham School) is named in its memory.

The canal was designed as part of a water navigation system that would link Leicester and Stamford, but the stretch between Oakham and Stamford was never built. The Oakham to Melton stretch had other problems too – it leaked, parts dried up in hot weather and the construction of the Melton to Stamford railway line in the 1840s brought its useful life to an end.

Today, large sections of the canal have silted up and disappeared, but some parts are still visible and clues to its existence can be found in the buildings, names and structures in the north-west of the county.

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St Peter and St Paul, Langham

The earliest parts of Langham parish church date back to the 13th century, but there also appears to have been a major rebuilding of the main body of the church in the 14th century. This might be connected with the rise of Simon de Langham, a local man who, in the mid-1300s, became first Abbot of Westminster, then Archbishop of Canterbury and finally a Cardinal. He is said to have made several donations to the church in his place of birth.

Inside the church, look for the 14th century stone font and a 15th century alabaster grave slab engraved with the figures of John Clarke and his wives.

Market Overton

The settlement at Market Overton probably dates back to Roman times; many Roman artefacts have been found in the village and the earthworks to the north and east of the church are thought to be Roman in origin.

The village was important in Saxon times too; an early pagan cemetery to the south-east produced many fine grave goods, and the church tower dates to the 10th century.

There are references to a market here from the early 12th century – hence the name – and the village green probably marks the location of the medieval marketplace. Today, it is home to the village stocks and whipping post!

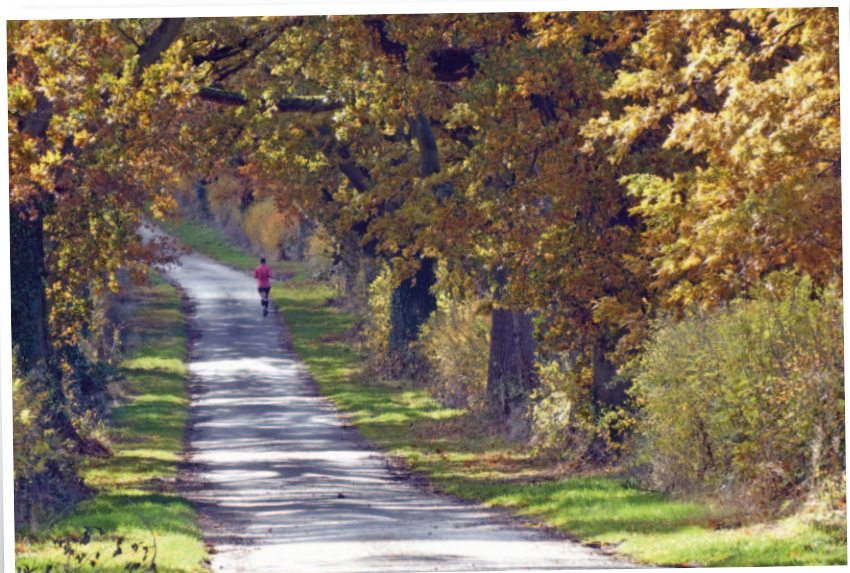
Continue along the Main Street, from the village green and turn left into Bowling Green Lane and you will arrive at a small enclosed quiet area. This is the village pinfold, historically an area for impounding stray animals, and was restored by the parish council. To the south of the village you will find The Lodge Trust Country Café, with children's play area and country park.

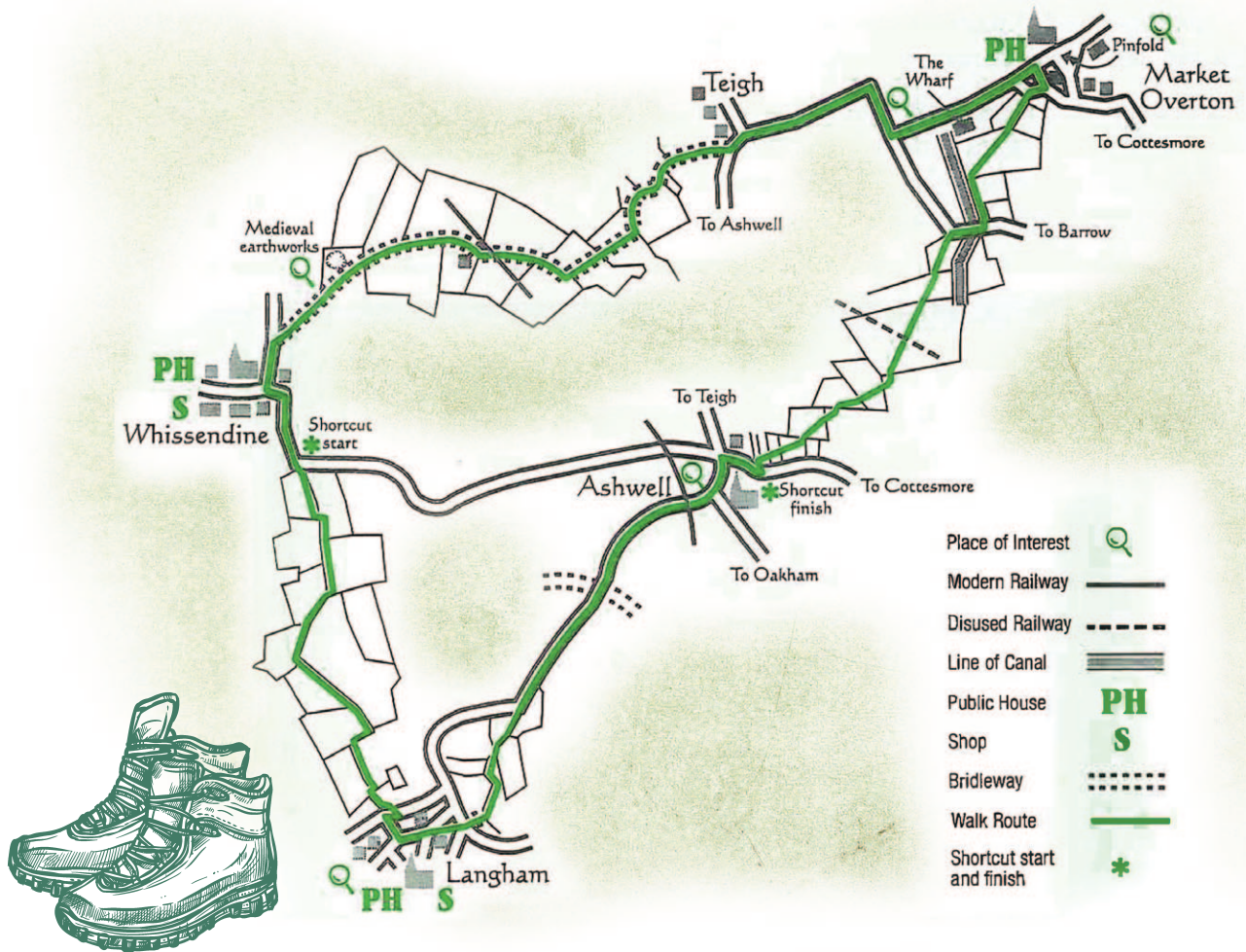


Head to the right across the fields, following the clear yellow waymarking signs. The first field contains some interesting earthworks, old enclosures and possible building foundations. The next two fields contain a well-preserved ridge and furrow (a sign of medieval ploughing). Continue through a kissing gate, still heading across the fields. At a gap in the hedge line, cross over a footbridge and head, slightly to the left, towards the field boundary and a sleeper bridge. Once across the sleeper bridge, there is a Waymark on your right. Walk diagonally across this next field, over a drainage channel, to a gap in the hedge line.

Here is the line of a dismantled railway (now a grassy lane) on which Rocks By Rail: The Living Ironstone Museum is located. Unfortunately, as pretty as it looks, you can't walk this route because it's private land, but do plan a visit to the museum another time. Cross over the lane and head back out into a field. Walk diagonally across two more fields, over a footbridge and then through a kissing gate to reach the road.

This quiet back road leads to Barrow. Turn right and follow it for a short way until you see a footpath Waymark to your left. Cross over the stile into the field. To your left you can see the remnants of the Oakham to





Melton canal – a deep hollow, stretches of water and hawthorn boundaries. Walk alongside it until you reach a stile and footbridge on the right.

Cross over and follow the left-hand edge of the field round to a stile and another footbridge. Now head across the field to a gap in the hedge line that takes you onto a grass path which is the final uphill walk into Market Overton, emerging on Berry Bushes. Turn right to reach the village green with its stocks and whipping post.

Turn left, past the village shop to return to your starting point near the church.

SAFER WALKING

- Be prepared – wear suitable clothing and sturdy footwear, take refreshments and directions.
- Respect the countryside – take care in crops and be considerate of livestock.
- Take care when crossing or walking on roadways and walk facing oncoming traffic.
- Fasten all gates, keep dogs under close control and guard against fire.
- Please show consideration to village residents by parking cars responsibly and making sure all dog mess is appropriately cleared away.
- Remember to take nothing but photos and leave nothing but footprints!



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